

DOCTORAL THESIS

An attempt to mirror the painterly and stillness in autobiographical visual practice

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**An Attempt to Mirror the Painterly and Stillness
in Autobiographical Visual Practice**

by

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Abstract

An Attempt to Mirror the Painterly and Stillness in Autobiographical Visual Practice is a practice-as-research project consisting of a portfolio of videos, photographs, and the documentation of live performances, and a written thesis. The written part is intended to work as a supportive body of material for the portfolio – or ‘brackets’, as it will be referred in the text – revealing the creative process behind those artworks, and the central thinkers, writers and artists that are relevant to this study, as well as offering contextualisation through an exploration of the lineage of other artists and discussions within which my practice-as-research project resides. The writing is built around the idea of ‘attempts’, in a written interpretation of a method I have applied to many of the artworks. Another key word of the study, the aforementioned brackets, is inspired by Virginia Woolf’s use of brackets in her novel *To The Lighthouse*. In this thesis I will explain the way in which these brackets have inspired me in the creation of many of the artworks. This will also offer an insight into how I relate to the text from within a visual artistic practice generally, and how using the brackets as a concept has also become a tool for identifying relationships between the art pieces presented in the portfolio and the written thesis itself. The text also reveals the multifaceted role of the painterly within this study project. The painterly will be discussed as a poetic-atmospheric visual frame for the artworks, and will also be explored in terms of how it emerges if the movement or the moving image is slowed down, which in turn brings this painterly quality of the artwork into close parallel with the still life painting genre. Finally, I will demonstrate, through the exploration of three artists from the past – Gwen John, Helene Schjerfbeck, and Virginia Woolf – the complexity of the writings of art history, biographies, and autobiographies.

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and occasional explicit nudity in my works would be received by my family I remember her saying, “No matter what you do, or how you are, you will always be my daughter”.

May 2015, London. Eeva-Mari Haikala

Chapter 1: Two Attempts for Prologue

Attempt I

This text forms the written part of the practice-as-research project *An Attempt to Mirror the Painterly and Stillness in Autobiographical Visual Practice*. It is intended to work alongside the portfolio, revealing the thinkers, writers and artists that have been central to my research. The intention is for the reader to begin with the portfolio and the discs before turning to the written part. In this written thesis the reader will often find images amongst the text, when a particular work is being discussed, and/or to provide insight into key themes or research questions being raised in the research project. Similarly, inside the portfolio, details are provided about in which chapter these works are mentioned. Not every picture from the portfolio is found inside the text, since the written part is intended to offer a broader overview rather than individual explanation of the works. When an artwork is mentioned for the first time in each chapter, there is a reference to the disc on which this work is to be found. This begins in the second chapter. Pictures begin to appear from chapter 3 (*An Attempt to Juxtapose Still Life Painting Genre and Stillness with Performance Art*) onwards, as chapter 2, which contextualises my own practice with the practices of other artists and various debates, is considered to provide a more general approach than chapters 3 and 4 (*An Attempt to Work Alongside Three Artists from the Past: Gwen John, Helene Schjerfbeck and Virginia Woolf*). The first chapter is divided into two different prologues. Whilst some subjects overlap and appear in both of the attempts, fundamentally the first prologue introduces the terms and main ideas of the research project, and the second one addresses the role of text and writing within this study.

The written part of my practice-as-research project breathes alongside the artworks presented in the portfolio. It is vital in its own right, and yet at the same time it does not dwell at the very epicentre of the project, as the primary aim has been to explore the ways in which the research can manifest in visual rather than written form. The written part of the thesis serves to reveal the main themes – or research questions – about stillness, the painterly, brackets, attempts, and the connections that I have uncovered with female artists from the past. The portfolio itself also provides information and knowledge – in some ways more detailed and direct in its nature than the nature of the written part – gained during the research process, and directly relevant to the works presented. Chapter 2: *An Attempt for Contextualisation* also functions like the idea of an introduction to a practice-as-research study project, as it introduces the context of the debates, and the lineage of the other artists to which my practice belongs, whilst it also opens up and explores more deeply the key terms used during the research process.

Brackets

I see this text as operating like brackets – a concept that I will introduce and scrutinise in Chapter 4: *An Attempt to Work Alongside Three Artists from the Past: Gwen John, Helene Schjerfbeck and Virginia Woolf* – offering more information about the works in the portfolio as well as working as a support, much as brackets support bookshelves on the wall. In considering the entire study process, this written aspect is also similar in status to a parenthesis. Parentheses have been described as: “original, relevant, central, emphatic and indicative of the crux of argument.” (McLouglin, 2014: 954.) This text reveals the theoretical and art historical background of the artworks and describes the artistic research process, but at the same time, much as parentheses or brackets in text

are utilised, it also provides a space for the artworks to stand on their own. Perhaps like a parenthesis in a dramatic script, which is generally not intended to be read out loud, it provides vital information on how to interpret the text. My attempt – a term I will return to later – has been to create a unity in which despite the independent status of the artworks, their process is completed by the written elements.

During this research project the brackets appeared as a source of interest long before I decided that they would also be a useful method for connecting the visual practice and the written part of the research project. I was intrigued by how Virginia Woolf used brackets in her novel *To The Lighthouse*, particularly in the chapter *Time Passes*. It includes seven notions that are placed inside brackets within the chapter. In all of them the given information is connected to loss, to death, or to the impression of how time passes by. These are the themes I was already working with through the concept of still life, and Woolf's use of these particular brackets inspired me to create a photographic series within the *Kiss Me* series, called *Untitled series (St Ives)* (disc 5). Subsequently, whilst researching further into the use of brackets in Virginia Woolf's writings, I discovered Kate McLoughlin's eye-opening interpretation of Woolf's use of brackets. McLoughlin's reading proved to be relevant both in terms of how the brackets in *Time Passes* have a theoretical resonance with the themes I have been working with during the research process, and also in terms of how brackets as a concept would act as a space in which the written part of the practice-as-research project and the artworks created during the project could connect with each other. I will develop further in Chapter 4 the way in which McLoughlin's text *Woolf's crotchets: a textual cryogenics in To The Lighthouse, Textual Practice* (2014) opened up the possibility for me to combine Woolf's use of brackets with themes that were already present in my studies –

the painterly and the still life – as well as with issues connected to still life, such as memory and loss, ways to express atmosphere in a manner that I consider to be painterly, the discussion between the vertical and the horizontal, and the question of autobiography.

As I have said, the methodology of the concept of brackets has been indispensable in enabling me to create a connection between the artworks and the written aspect of the research. Moreover, brackets have allowed me to navigate the gap between the two in such a way that it has become a meaningful place of its own. I have come to see them as a place of evaluation, a place which provides information, a place which verbalises the non-written meaning of the artworks submitted. Indeed, this place has served to greatly inform and strengthen the way in which the text itself works for the artworks presented in the portfolio.

Attempts

The written text is shaped around *attempts*, which have been a familiar method in my arts practice since long before my research studies began at the University of Roehampton. The written part of this study is built on five chapters, called *attempts*. There is rarely only one story or explanation behind the creative process in my practice, and this is equally as true when working with the practice-as-research process as it is with more settled research questions. The written attempts – chapters – are a suggestion to the reader as to how they might wish to approach the works. Naming them as attempts therefore provides space for the reader's own reactions and thoughts. The same holds true for the artworks, regardless of whether they carry the attempt in their names

or not. There is also a more philosophical reason to work with the concept of attempts, in connection to stillness and to Heidegger's use of the term *Verfallen*, which I will address in chapter 2 (stillness will be discussed in the context of still life in chapter 3). Both stillness and *Verfallen* – falling – are moments that at first glance might appear to be stabile, useless, even mistakes. Ultimately, however, both carry a lot of potential inside themselves. In Stillness, *Verfallen* and in the attempts, it is the action itself that matters the most. This kind of thinking is comparable to a conceptual art approach in underlining the idea rather than the final result. In practice, the use of an attempt as a description of the method is derived from a working approach wherein I am often trying to execute a movement or take a posture that is physically impossible for the human body to achieve. Alternatively I will be manipulating time, resisting the common understanding of its continuous nature. The concept of attempts also relates to my understanding of art in general. I see art as a place of freedom, a field for testing, for 'trying out'. It is a place where more (or at least something different) is possible than in reality. Because of the attempt, the trying, the making, the doing – including failure – matter. After immersing both myself and my practice within academia, a place with its own rules, traditions, and conventions, I have come to see the attempt as a strategy to work also with artistic research, whereby the research results are perhaps less objectively defined than within traditional academic studies. Art, either based on research or not, does not bend into clear boundaries of themes and theories, and neither are there words for all that a piece of art presents or carries. 'Attempt' within this text is a possibility for me to offer these approaches that I have chosen for the project, and the individual artworks within, whilst acknowledging that they are not the only possible approaches. In this sense, the 'attempt' in the titles of the art pieces could be also understood as being a 'study'. In *Attempt to Retrieve the Past* (disc 6) I am studying

how the body can remember and also how the body relates with the space. As there is no clear answer for this, as I have tried to show by choosing the attempt as one of my methodologies, there is always an openness in artistic practice and how it is interpreted. In a way, the ‘attempt’ is like stillness or Heidegger’s *Verfallen* – a place where potentiality hides.

The key use of attempts within this study can be divided into three sections. The first one, which explains how the attempt has been used to shape this text, is explored above. The second major approach for the attempts focuses on still life painting and stillness. In this section (Chapter 3) I have attempted to emphasise in both written form and in the artworks how the still life – the genre that originally belongs to the realm of painting – shares common features with live performance and lens-based performance. Within the text in chapter 3 I look at the origins of still life and how it has been theorised, underlining the facts that make it possible to juxtapose these two different art genres. In performance artworks – either lens-based or live – where there are still life qualities, the attempt is to show how performance, as an art form where the human body is present, can retain the same features as still life painting – the genre that traditionally leaves the human body outside of the composition. This has also been a reason why, inside of the history of art, still life has been gendered, and seen as belonging more to the feminine, thus having less meaning than heroic subjects, including for example the human body. I will return to this notion in chapter 3, and it can also be seen in some of my artworks (also introduced in chapter 3 about still life) in terms of how I have dealt with everyday objects or food in my compositions and performances. There are various attempts inside the art pieces that have approaches towards stillness, and the works that are dealing with stillness can be found throughout the different sections of the portfolio. In the

videoworks *Candy Floss*, *A Banana Starts with a B*, *Egg*, and *A Cooking Pot* (all in disc 7), the reference of using household items or food comes directly from my studies of the history of still lifes, as is also the case with the short video *Still Life with Flies* (disc 7), which includes the often-seen bugs of still life paintings, except I have removed all elements other than the flies and the jar in which they were preserved in a video, still naming the piece *Still Life* (disc 7). *Vie Coye (Citron)* and *Vie Coye (Fin)* (both in disc 7) are explained in more detail in chapter 3, where the focus is on how time is manipulated in those pieces, as well as showing how the still life – as well as my pieces – are set-up situations. This same kind of approach is also to be found in the *Kiss Me/St Ives* pieces, such as the () *Reading the brackets from To The Lighthouse's part 'Time Passes'* photo diptych (disc 5). I see stillness, alongside the other main themes of this study (and despite the fact that the work is not as much still life as are the works mentioned above), also resonating in *Hamish and Eeva II* (disc 1), where the movement, in spite of the strong effort and energy, does not in the end lead anywhere. In *Hamish and Eeva I* the male body is drawing, or perhaps sculpting, a female body from a memory. This gesture is directly connected to a powerful element that comes from still lifes and their interpretations and theories (as will be discussed in chapter 3) of how the human body is present in still life composition despite its physical absence.

In this study, these attempts and the fact that they are connected to the still life genre is at the core of expressing how the moving image and performance can be juxtaposed with painting. This is an attempt which is something that I, as an artist with a background in art history and visual and performance studies, can contribute to the wider academic audience.

My research interests of autobiography are also connected to the attempt. Within my research I have explored the complexities of how biographies and autobiographies are written and used inside art history. Within this aspect of the study my attempt has been to combine these explorations with the use of my own autobiography, which has been a natural way for me to work since the beginning of my artistic career, as I have always used my own body and life experiences as a source for the artistic creation. In this study I focused on three historical artists as case studies for my attempt: the writer Virginia Woolf and the painters Gwen John and Helene Schjerfbeck. This attempt began with the study of the biographies of Helene Schjerfbeck, focusing in particular on the facts that resonated with my own life experiences. During Schjerfbeck's sojourn in England, she spent time in St Ives, Cornwall, which is also where Virginia Woolf spent her childhood summers. This geographic coincidence led me to create the project *Kiss Me/St Ives*. In the *Kiss Me* performance (disc 4) I coupled facts from art history with those of my own life. This larger piece followed the *Schjerfbeck performance (disc 4)*, which for me was at same time both public performance and testing ground for working further with the question of autobiography.

Focusing purely on the text of the *Kiss Me* performance or the *Schjerfbeck performance*, it can be seen as an artistic reference system that combines facts from art history and the performer's autobiography. The gestures, videos, sounds and pictures were intended – were an attempt – to create a disturbance in the presented facts. Similarly, this is how I conceive of the attempts working throughout the whole study process: as an acknowledgement that there are several possible approaches towards using and interpreting these facts. The academic research-based nature of the performance was

also underlined by presenting the information leaflet as a bibliography, in the style of that of a written academic study.

The Gwen John project is as a whole less intrinsically cohesive than *Kiss Me/St Ives*, as it includes more tests or study-type art piece attempts. I adapted the artistic bibliography use for performances which were based on John's own writings. The primary research attempt inside the Gwen John project was based on the question of the tension and relationship between the artist and his/her model, and how to express that corporeally. To explore this question I collaborated with three choreographers/dancers (artworks called *Collaborations with Favela Vera Ortiz* (disc 2) and *Siriol Joyner* (disc 3), and *Hamish and Eeva I-II*) in an attempt to bring sculpture, painting and performance together, as well as to express the tension between two people through movement. The first attempt at working with a choreographer was with Favela Vera Ortiz. With her, the method was for me to provide my body and props to the choreographer, in addition to our discussions about the facts that I had uncovered through my research into John. I gave my body to the choreographer to be shaped according to what she thought it could do and the results were five surrealistic attempts with the space, body and props (eggs and a fake clown nose). When working with choreographer and dancer Siriol Joyner, the emphasis was on Auguste Rodin's sculptures and contact improvisation, in a process that offered new realisations about the tensions and possibilities between two bodies. This knowledge was expanded when I was working towards the idea of lens-based performance with a male dancer, which culminated in working with dancer and choreographer Hamish MacPherson. In the end, *Hamish and Eeva I-II* are works which are based on autobiography, and they also incorporate my understanding of the results

of the bodily experiments undertaken with Vera Ortiz and Joyner, as well as the questions of memory and remembering which are directly connected to the still lifes.

The word *mirror* in the title *An Attempt to Mirror the Painterly and Stillness in Autobiographical Visual Practice* is also connected to the concept of attempts. The use of the word mirror comes partly from how I use existing facts from art history as an element of my practice. I borrowed the idea from Professor of Contemporary Theatre and Performance Stephen Bottoms' text in the book he co-edited: *Small Acts of Repair: Performance, Ecology and Goat Island* (2007), which introduces and scrutinises the practice of the performance group Goat Island. In the introduction Bottoms describes how the book represents an attempt to mirror the work of Goat Island (Bottoms, 2007: xi), while Goat Island itself uses attempts as a method; a method with which, as mentioned above, I feel familiar. Another, even more important source for the use of the word 'mirror' as part of the name of the project, as well as for a prop for performances (for example in *Kiss Me*, *Schjerfbeck-performance*, and in the composition of the super 8 film *Mirror*) comes from the autobiographical writings of Virginia Woolf. When reflecting upon her childhood, Woolf writes of the shame she felt when looking at her body in the glass in the hall of her home (Woolf, 1976: 68). This asserts for me the idea that the act of 'mirroring' is a subjective one. Woolf was not conscious of any sense of shame until she saw the reflection of her own body; so that the act of being under the gaze was the very thing that gave her this uncomfortable feeling; it happened in that precise moment. Moreover, it happened in isolation. Even if there would have been, or were, others in the same room, they would have not experienced the moment in the same way, they would have instead perhaps reflected their *own* feelings about what *they* were seeing in the same image. Similarly, whilst writing this text about my practice and

the connected theories and texts, I am actually mirroring my own point of view, without expecting the viewer of my artworks to see the same things or themes within that I do. In contrast to the explicit solitude of Woolf mirroring herself alone in the glass at home – something which is very familiar for me as an artist, as much of my practice happens inside the studio, where I am alone most of the time, only revealing the art pieces to others when they are finished and ready for exhibition or performance – this practice-as-research project has re-situated my 'mirroring act', making it public. I am offering my views and ideas for sharing, which arguably places me in the position of being 'next to' the reader. My attempt with this is that we would mirror together our views that are reflected back from my artworks.

The painterly

As a term, *the painterly* traditionally relates to oil painting. In my practice the painterly could be described to be a 'strategy of metamorphosis', a term used by writer and photographer Juha Suonpää to explain the tools and methods used by many contemporary photographic artists to apply the values of other art forms to their practice (Suonpää, 2011: 120-123). Technically my practice is clearly not painting, but performance-related visual art. I am transferring the ideas of painting onto other media, and imbuing these media with the quality of the painterly. My usage of the term is close to but still different from the concept of video painting, which often refers to the technical aspects of videos, of the way in which they are displayed, like a painting, on a flat screen on the wall, as paintings hang in the gallery. My approach is more philosophical. I see the painterly to be something that is part of painting's ontology, the nature of it, but at the same time something that intertwines with the ontology of other

art forms. Revealing this is my main original contribution to knowledge: I am showing the epistemological tensions between the different art genres of painting and moving image via the concept of the painterly, using the still life genre and theoretical aspects of the still and stillness as a theoretical frame. The painterly and its multifaceted nature in my practice-as-research project will be introduced in the following way: chapter 2 gives information about how the painterly occurs as an atmosphere for the lineage of artists to which I belong. Chapter 3 introduces the painterly in the context of still life – still life being the genre belonging to the painterly's original realm, to the painting. Finally, in chapter 4 I will explore how writing can also be interpreted as painterly. Whilst creating artworks within this project, the painterly has worked as a visual frame for many of the art pieces, either by the selection of subject if it is inspired by the history of art; or in the way that the work is composed, in concern of what kind of atmosphere it is creating. First and foremost, the painterly for me comes from the slowing down of movement and time in time-based media, which is why still life has been at the centre of my studies. However, all art which is situated outside of the realm of painting, but which uses traditional painting themes or nods towards classical painting compositions, can be scrutinised under this idea of the painterly. In this project I will be focusing on these tensions both in the written research and in my arts practice. Within this text I will also be introducing the idea of Virginia Woolf's novel as containing traces of the painterly. In my video works the stillness, and thus the painterly, occur through gestures where my self, in front of the camera, and/or the camera itself, is still, thereby creating the illusion of the video as a still image. This stillness functions as a tool for adding various representational layers into the artworks. For example, it allows me to emphasise the staged nature of both of the still life painting and my video works. My approach towards still life and stillness brings the

performance towards a phenomenological philosophical encounter – and therein the ontology of these art genres – which supports the notion of the relevance of the painterly. The themes that I introduce alongside the tension between still life and contemporary art are the biographies and autobiographies of female artists who have been lesser-known in their own times, the qualities of the painterly within visual art, and what it means for an artist to put herself in the frame.

The portfolio is a fundamental component and is itself an attempt for original knowledge with its original artworks. The portfolio is divided into five sections. The core projects are *Gwen John* and *Kiss Me/St Ives*, both of which consist of several smaller projects. These two main projects are inspired by artists from the past, their letters and notebooks, the subjects of their practice, and how they have been represented in the field of art history. Alongside those two projects, the portfolio section *Videos* also includes several individual projects. These works are each based on different ideas, attempts and themes, which are explained in the text within the portfolio. *Elle se sentait profondément honteuse* is a series bringing attention to the feeling of shame, which is dimly present when using one's own body and autobiographical material as a part of a piece. *The Only Happy I Know is Sad Happy* (disc 10) is a photography series exploring the relationship between the human body and space. *Pizza* (disc 12) introduces a performance that emphasises the tension between the audience and the performer.

Attempt II

The 'style' and tone of this text shares similarities with performative writing, which in my case is quite natural to engage with as an approach, because I am in the position of authoring these written elements in close connection with the practice elements. I see my act of writing in a similar light to the way in which Della Pollock explains performative writing; as a discursive practice, and thus a form that expresses what writing *does*. It can be seen as an intervention into the normative use of the writing or the text (Pollock, 1998: 75). Pollock describes performative writing as an invitation to the reader to read *with* the author (Pollock, 1998: 81). In dividing this text into attempts, I am inviting the reader to reflect upon the artworks with me. With each attempt I am offering a view, and opening up the background of my practice, whilst being aware that it is one of a variety of possible approaches. The idea of performative writing also interacts closely with one of the key themes that I have been working with. The two major projects within this study, *Kiss Me/St Ives* and *Gwen John*, have their research background in historiography, which I will be scrutinising critically. Both projects are based on questions of how art history is written and the narrative of art history writing. This is not an attempt to try to provide an answer to these questions, or to argue what might be the correct approach towards creating a historical narrative, but rather to underline the complexity of the historiography and to highlight the fact that it is a construction based on various factors, for example the values of the period of time in which it is written. In the pieces I mention above I have mixed my own life experiences with the biographical facts of certain female artists (who will be introduced in detail below) from the past. My approach to these works was very close to "narrative history" or "experimental" historiography, in which the historian writes herself into or alongside the object of the

research. Pollock, despite being critical of new history writing, argues that this kind of approach does contain the dynamic power required to shake the hierarchies of historical writing (Pollock, 1998: 76). I see this, and my practice – if perceived from the angle of art history – as an attempt to ‘open up’ the historiography through the language of performance-related visual arts. Using art history as a method is something that is also drawn from my previous education. Alongside an MA in Visual Arts Studies, I also have an MA in Art History. Although I would not describe myself as an art historian, my interest in the discipline is clearly visible in my practice. As a student of art history I was influenced by art historians who used autobiographical experiences as part of their writing, such as Finnish art historian Anna Kortelainen who, in her book *Virginie! Albert Edelfeltin rakastajattaren tarina* (2002), which is about the model of one of the most accomplished painters of Finnish art history Albert Edelfeld (1854-1905), wrote her research journey in such a way as to include information about her personal life as part of the research into the roots of the painter’s model. In a similar sense, when conducting artistic research, i.e. in writing about my own practice, which is strongly based on autobiographical elements, I use an approach that is very much subjective, which is, as Pollock suggests, another key element of performative writing (Pollock, 1998: 86). Brackets are another theme alongside the autobiographical that I have been using both within this text and in *Kiss Me/St Ives project*. Brackets appeared to me initially through Virginia Woolf’s novel *To The Lighthouse*. First they inspired me to see the connections between the novel and still life painting, and later they became an essential tool for me in understanding how my written research would work together with the portfolio presentation of my practice.

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To place oneself within a practice-as-research project is a complex question, one that haunts most PhD students who have chosen this research route, in which the practice is at the centre of our studies. After numerous attempts to write, to re-write, to navigate the space between practice and research, to organise all the research material into one unified body of work, I have finally found a home within which to place myself. This feeling of being at home when writing is similar to that which French writer and filmmaker Georges Perec, whose writings I will be referring to in this as well the portfolio texts, describes as an empty page which is one of those places he encounters daily (Perec 1997: 9). While I was trying to find a way to write about my practice, I started to feel how this space – these white sheets on the screen of my laptop – where I am writing, is a similar space to the space that I am dealing with, both mentally and literally, when planning a new film, photographic or performance art work. Both are spaces that I deal with daily. Whilst ordinarily I might not have considered these types of spaces as parallel to one another, through the activity of the practice-as-research study I have developed an alternative awareness of its space, or state of mind if you like. It has become a space for scrutiny, a field where the research takes place.

Text itself has been at the centre of my practice for a long time, which was probably one of the reasons why I was interested in starting an artistic research PhD. Before becoming a research student, the role of the text was more in the background; or at least I was less conscious of its role within my practice. When I placed myself into academia the text became more clearly central, not only because it is something that I have used as a source of inspiration and research, but also because during the process I have

learned the extent to which text and words dominate as a means of communication at university. This is something with which I have struggled for a certain amount of time, and perhaps the reason behind this problematic encounter is that the very presence of the written word collided starkly with one of my primary aims, which was to explore ways of presenting research results in the form of visual artworks. For me the way to navigate through this dilemma was to be aware of how I, as a visual artist, see the role of the text within my practice. This moved text to the centre of the research project – a place where it had perhaps always been, although I had simply not seen it there before. For all the time I have been working with this research process text has been lurking around, slowly stepping into the light to make itself known.

I am, as I think many artists are, often asked, “Where did you get the idea to do this and/or that?” when I am showing my art. In most cases I am not able to answer to this question, or at least I am not able to give a specific, succinct explanation or answer, despite the fact that I might be trained to do so. I graduated with my MA in Visual Arts Studies in 2004 from the University of Art and Design Helsinki, in a programme that focused on teaching artists to learn to open up their creative processes, to contextualise their practices theoretically. After this experience I felt that art students were almost fundamentally required to write about their practice – yet I found myself in the situation of the shoemaker’s children not having any shoes. This situation, together with the fact that I am doing a practice-as-research PhD, combined to bring the role of text into the limelight. It became very much central to some of my main research questions. Firstly ‘the painterly’ as a term related to painting requires words to describe what it means when the concept of the painterly is transported to another media, in my case lens-based performance. Mostly I have been using the painterly either as a visual frame, or

conceptually in the background of the pieces. Another question arose from my close work with the biographical writings, letters and notebook marks of the painters. Both research enquiries have played an inspirational role in my creative process. My attempt to translate this inspiration into the work of a PhD has meant holding these questions and trying, at least temporarily, to tame them.

I have been interested in how the history of art has been written; what facts have been seen as important, and how art historians have used texts which were written by artists themselves – letters, diaries, notebooks – to create the stories that constitute art history. Within this study I have focused on two female painters from late nineteenth and early twentieth century: Helene Schjerfbeck and Gwen John. They have both dwelled partly in the shadows of the history of art because of their gender, although this is not been my main interest in working alongside these painters. What intrigues me most about those two painters is, as I have said, the texts they wrote; their letters, diaries and notebooks. Texts that were originally meant for private use, but were later adopted by art research and art history writing to play a role in writing the narrative of those artists. That narrative itself has then played a role when these artists have gained a place in art history. Helene Schjerfbeck's letters to her painter sisters (as the Finnish painters of the time called themselves) and Gwen John's letters to her love(r) Auguste Rodin have been raised out of the intimate realm – if we consider their careers, their paintings, their artworks as primary, and their personal lives as secondary – like 'brackets' within the story of their artistic achievements. This led me to the dilemma of the questions "what right do we as art historians have to go through texts that are originally intended for private use?" and "who is the person behind the biographies and autobiographies?" I will not attempt to provide a concrete answer to these questions, nor is it within the

scope of this thesis to explore them in exhaustive detail, but it is certainly a theme which is in the background of two of my main artistic projects: *Kiss Me* and *Gwen John*, both of which are based on the biographies and autobiographies (or letters) of the artists.

The use of fiction has been of equal importance to me in this study as have both the historiography of, and the personal texts by, Helene Schjerfbeck and Gwen John. For the idea of brackets, the novel *To The Lighthouse*, and the various interpretations of it, have been essential, as I will argue in the section entitled *An Attempt to Work Alongside Three Artists from the Past: Gwen John, Helene Schjerfbeck and Virginia Woolf*. As the corners of my practice touch the field of performance art, one paragraph from Eleanor Catton's novel *The Rehearsal* caught my attention and became the centre of my performance titled *Pizza*. The happenings in the book take place in a theatre school, and Catton herself has spoken of her use of performance and performative elements as an essential methodology for the plot of the novel (Catton, 2009). What happens in the book is based upon the power relationship between teacher and student (a question which is also echoed in the context of the model and artist relationship in my *Gwen John* project, to which I will refer later in this text). As a result of Catton's methodology, the story is described fragmentarily so that 'the truth' of what really happened, and what was just a rehearsal for a performance, are intertwined and overlapped. Finding sudden ideas and inspirations from books has been quite present in my practice for years. The process commonly unfolds in such a way that, as it did with Catton's *The Rehearsal* and my piece *Pizza*, I am reading a book (or some text) simply for pleasure, and during this process of reading an idea for a visual piece will strike me. In my earlier education we were all but forbidden to use expressions such as 'the idea

just struck me', and instead trained to bond ideas and practice with theory and context. I believe the unconscious has an important role to play in the creative processes, and for me one of the fundamental reasons for creating visual or bodily-related works is that there are other languages to express beyond the merely semantic. This is perhaps the place I am in when the text-based ideas 'just strike me', and also explains possibly why it has been necessary to take a long research route to find and give text the acknowledgement and meaning within my practice that it deserves. To be 'struck whilst reading' has a similar kind of quality as that of brackets within a text. They are moments that invite me to pause the process of reading, to have a break, to think something new yet still related to the text, to take notes. Using excerpts from a text signals a moment of full artistic freedom. The notes and possible artworks that the idea might lead to do not in the end necessarily have a great deal in common with the text that they refer to.

This 'freeform' dancing between the text and the visual artwork is essential for much of my practice, including this artistic research project. For me, it is easiest to find the freedom of the unconscious within fictional text, over and above some other forms of the written word. Although I am arguably significantly more comfortable when working with texts from art history, as opposed to 'pure' philosophy, since as I mentioned previously I have a particular familiarity with the discipline, I nevertheless do indeed attempt to carefully and selectively address more strictly philosophical considerations in my approach to the interpretation of the works.

Much of the philosophical writing that I will be referring to addresses the 'openness' of the creative process – a concept which I explore throughout this thesis – through the

semiotics of Roland Barthes as well as, for example, through Gaston Bachelard's phenomenological considerations. I will also be referring to certain texts that speak to me very much in the sense of 'visual thinking', such as those of Georges Perec.

I also find other writers' interpretations supportive. Regarding phenomenology, I have looked to Dr. André Lepecki's introductions to Martin Heidegger's concept of *Verfallen*. In addition, I have worked with the texts of two Finnish academics – both of whom are doctors of aesthetics and philosophy – Dr. Sara Heinämaa, a specialist in phenomenology, and Dr. Saara Hacklin, who is also curator of Kiasma Museum of Contemporary Art in Helsinki, who both write about Maurice Merleau-Ponty's theories in the context of analysing contemporary art.

From the field of art history the Professor of Art History Norman Bryson's *Looking at the Overlooked: Four Essays on Still Life Painting* has been a useful tool in arguing the similarities between the painting genre of still life and performance art. To study painters from the past, essential art historians have been Sue Roe, who has written the latest and to my mind the most objective biography of Gwen John, and Riitta Kontinen who has raised awareness of many Finnish female artists, including Helene Schjerfbeck. My referential approach to Kontinen's book is different from what might perhaps be described as the traditional academic reference system, in that instead of in written form, I give the details in the performance installation of *Kiss Me*, and the references can be found in the leaflet which accompanies that piece.

As the nature of my practice is multidisciplinary, it has been necessary and indeed beneficial to combine various academic disciplines and text styles. If Bryson's book

was essential from an art history perspective for juxtaposing still life with performance art, André Lepecki's *Exhausting Dance: Performance and the Politics of Movement* was essential not only because of the relevance of the philosophical terms contained within, but also in terms of how to use performance studies to critically analyse still life and performance art together. Approaching performance from the angle of choreography, Lepecki's writings also offered me a way of thinking more broadly about how to adapt movement-based theoretical thoughts to a visual-based practice. As my research process gradually led me towards dance literature, movement itself became increasingly more relevant to my practice. I began to deliberately find ways to move my (lens-based) performances towards movement and body-based practice, at the same time as developing considerations about the way in which memory, and moreover the very act of remembering, occurs in our bodies.

Chapter 2: An Attempt for Contextualisation

Later in this written part of my research project I will be reflecting on my practice alongside two painters from the history of art, Helene Schjerfbeck and Gwen John. Each have been used as case studies for two of my artistic projects *Kiss Me/St Ives* and *Gwen John*. My approach has drawn primarily from writings either by or about them, rather than from their paintings (although these have mattered as well). Another important source of reflection in this text will be Virginia Woolf's novel *To The Lighthouse* as well as her autobiographical writings. All of the above aspects have played an important role in my research and could be understood as the 'vital inner part' of the research, directly influencing it and working as part of my theoretical frame and methodology, as well as being a reflective tool in relation to my practice. There are of course a vast amount of other artists who have influenced my work, and with whom I identify as an artist. In this chapter I attempt to place myself within the lineage of other artists by giving some examples, and to discuss the context in which I see my practice-as-research study belonging.

Lens-based performance

I have been working with the medium of video and photography for over ten years now. It is my primary medium, but still I do not feel wholly comfortable in labelling myself simply as a video artist, or a media artist (the other common term used for the artist using technology), or a photographer. Art historian Riikka Niemelä has described the situation: "Haikala is an artist of the digital age of the 21st century weaving her way through the multiplicity of mediums, traditions, imageries and ideologies available for art makers of today." (Niemelä, 2014: 40.) As Robin Nelson points out, this kind of

multidisciplinary approach is also typical for practice-as-research projects. “In my experience, PaR is likely to be interdisciplinary and to draw upon a range of sources in several fields; and while it is not possible for a PaR student to equal the specialist in all disciplines drawn upon, the shortfall does not amount to lack of thoroughness.”

(Nelson, 2013: 34.) Other chapters will offer an impression of how I have used literature studies when exploring the questions of brackets, and art history (historiography) as a source when using painters from art history as elements of case-studies for this project, and in this chapter I will show how both lens-based work (video, film, photography) and performance have worked in the context of this study.

A common feature of my videos is that despite them being moving images (another term that could be used alongside media/video art) they are often very similar to still images, including paintings as well as photographs. Not much happens and the camera is motionless when the filming is done. This is one of the features that gives a painterly quality to my videos. When on display the effect is similar to having a painting (or a still photograph) on the wall. The compositions and the themes I am working with draw from the history of painting. For example, photoseries *54 Attempts for Sulky Face* (disc 3) is directly influenced by Gwen John’s painting *Study for a Girl Holding a Doll*, which is also titled ‘*a girl with a sulky expression*’. In the photoseries I am, with my body language and facial expressions, trying to represent the feeling of sulkiness which John’s painting is described as having.

Alongside – or, when talking about lens-based performances – *inside* my camera-based art is performance. Once again I am not comfortable with being identified solely as a performance artist. Both within this study and in the art world I prefer to use the term

lens-based performance, as the name holds both medias, and does not separate them.

With lens-based performance I refer to performances that are made for the camera with the intention of becoming independent video pieces, rather than just performance documentations. In many cases the piece could simply be called a video piece, but, as author and a performer in these pieces, it matters to me that they are performances, as the process and the bodily expressions matter and they do have performative qualities to them, starting with the fact that I am performing in them. The term lens-based also includes the possibilities that working with the camera brings: editing possibilities, the technical sides of making a film/moving image. However, within this research project I have not made a great deal of use of post-production opportunities, the pieces are more holding the performativity in the sense that in most cases all that has happened in front of the camera is also visible for the audience. In some of the photos I am revealing the set-up quality of photos, as I have done in the photographs in the *Untitled series (St Ives)* (disc 5).

Bill Viola

It is worthy of note that my practice has been likened by some to American video artist Bill Viola's (b.1951) art. With no doubt he is one of the most well-known video/new media artists working with the concept of stillness in moving image at the moment, alongside for example the British film maker Tacita Dean (b.1965). Below I will reflect upon how I, as an artist and researcher working with the still image as moving image, think about and respond to the comparison between Viola's practice and my own.

Viola slows down time in time-based media, one of the key elements of moving image, just as in conceptual dance the movement is slowed down or even stopped (a theme I will return to later with Jérôme Bel and La Ribot), which is against dance's traditional ontology. Viola does so by manipulating the filming material and exploiting the technical potential of the media, whilst my approach is more convergent with the dance tradition: making the human body itself move slowly or be still. If I juxtapose Viola's *The Crossing* (1996) and my *Mist* (disc 7) there are similarities with the resemblance of monumentality in both pieces (*Mist* has been projected as a big screen installation in Kiasma Museum of Contemporary Art in 2010, and Viola's piece is a large room-sized installation). More similarities between the two works include the sculptural presentation of the body, the use of water, and the stillness of the performer. However, the methods used to create these elements of the pieces are very different for Viola and myself. The stillness in *Mist* comes from the fact that both the performer and the camera are standing still, including no zoom, during the whole time of the filming, and nor has there been any post-production editing. The length of the piece is related to the endurance of the body, of how long the two men assisting me outside of the camera were able to hold heavy water bottles still with extended arms whilst squirting water on to me. This gives a performative quality to the piece, and although it is not visible to the viewer it is an essential aspect of how time is handled in the work. Viola, on the other hand, manipulates time by using editing techniques, which has been his method since the early 1970s (Violette, 1995: 49). He is known for slowing down the motion (Perov, 2015: 164). *The Crossing* is a two screen video installation. In both screenings a man slowly approaches the camera. During the filming moment he is walking more or less at a normal pace, and the movement is slowed down through editing and by the choice of filming material. The piece is filmed on high-speed film, which is capable of registering

300 frames per second (the usual film speed, also used in my pieces, is 25 frames per second), with the result that the human figure appears to be more manipulated than in usual corporal movement. After approaching the camera the man stops and looks at the camera. The composition in this point is very similar to *Mist*. The installation is made of two films: on one screen the man's body is covered by flames, on the other – which has more similarities with the *Mist* – he is sprayed with water. It begins slowly, just odd water droplets dripping on this head, which gradually increase to become a waterfall covering the full body of the man. During this research process I made one video piece, *Train (slow)* (disc 13) which was part of the *Kiss Me* installation, where I used the slow-motion capabilities of the editing programme to slow down the 25 frames per second speed of both image and sound, but unlike in Viola's work, in my piece there is no human body, so the slowness is rather to create a dreamlike, surreal atmosphere together with the slowed soundtrack of the video, rather than the monumental and sculptural feeling of the human body that Viola explores in *The Crossing*.

The way in which Viola explores the body as a part of his video pieces is fascinating and something that I can relate to as well: for him bodily experience is not only about the visible body that we see in the video piece, but also it is the inner feelings of the figure that matter (Perov, 2015: 29). And it is not only the body in the piece that matters, but also the viewer who is watching it, as for Viola the most important place where his works exist is not the technical one, the museums, galleries, or screening surfaces, but the mind of the viewer (Perov, 2015: 163). This resonates with what I will explore in chapter 3 about how the body is present in still life paintings, even though the definition of the still life genre is traditionally a composition without a body. Still life's ontology is about reminding us of how time is passing by: *memento mori* – remember

that you die. The human body is absent in the traditional still life paintings, yet the viewer experiences it with his or her body and, just as Viola's perceptions of the human body suggest, this is as powerful a reminder of time as any object captured on the surface: the human body is central when experiencing an art piece and it is us humans in particular, amongst all other creatures, who can remember and anticipate the limits of life (Pühringer, 1994:152). For Viola, visual art, despite the fact that the name refers to the acts of seeing and looking, is first and foremost the art for the whole-body. Viola calls it a physical experience, which is also to be called sensual (Pühringer, 1994: 138).

These references to the history of art are another trace that connects my practice with Viola's, even though, again, our approaches are rather different from each other. My whole research is strongly based on art history, especially historiography. Viola creates pieces that resemble paintings from the past, especially religious and altar paintings, and he also displays his pieces in religious environments. A good example is his *Martyrs (Earth, Air, Fire, Water)* (2014) in St Paul's Cathedral, London, representing on plasma screen martyrs positioned in earth's basic elemental states. All of these approaches of Viola's, alongside the stillness and slowness, make his videos painterly in such a way that I understand and use the word within this study.

Nonetheless, my approach towards the painterly, especially in the context of the still, is closer to the previously mentioned Tacita Dean, another contemporary media artist working with stillness. There are also many more artists working with still lifes in the contemporary art world. One very well known example of still life and video is Sam Taylor-Wood's (b.1967) *Still life* (2001), with the rotting, mouldy fruit composition, which mirrors the traditional composition of still life paintings. Still, I feel more

connected with the approach Tacita Dean has towards the genre of moving image (her medium is film rather than video) in general, and how it resonates with the painterly. For example, Dean's video *Prisoners Pair* (2008), a close-up of pears decaying in glass bottle, shows the approach she is taking: poetic studies of silence. It is this poetic quality which is akin to what I see to be the painterly aesthetic within my study. This particular kind of understanding of the painterly is connected to the tradition in art history, in the history of painting and how the term is used there. This is the tradition to which my understandings of the painterly and the artworks made during this research belong. The word's origin comes from the art historian Heinrich Wölfflin (1864-1945). He used the term to separate painting (paintbrush traces) from linear lines. After the 1960s it has not been so easy to separate different art genres from one another, and in recent art discussion 'painterly' is often used to foreground the differences between painting and lens-based art. For example, many photographic artists, especially in Nordic countries (the geographic context to which I mostly belong as an artist), comment upon their practice using terms such as 'painter', 'painting' and 'painterly'. By this they mean that the camera works for them as a brush would for the painter when working with composition and capturing light. In this case painterly also incorporates subject matter. At the same time as dealing with typical contemporary art content, such as genre, politics and identity, painterly lens-based work relates (often compositionally) to a classical painting tradition. For example Elina Brotherus (b.1972) has named one of her series of photographs *The New Painting* (2000-2004). What connects her camera works with the painting genre is how she emphasises the significance of painting, and for example how she understands and deals with the colour – and how she remembers colours to be at the specific moment when the picture was taken, much as the landscape painters of 20th century did after moving from working with sketches done in nature to

the painting process in studio environment, as her solo show *The New Painting* in 2006 at the Finnish Museum of Photography expressed by exposing her notebooks alongside the pictures. In a catalogue published alongside the exhibition, Brotherus' relation to the tradition of painting was explained in the following terms: "Brotherus talks about the significance of painting, about painting sneaking into the different levels of the making of her work. When she is looking at her environment, making detailed notes of the colours she sees, and working in the darkroom, an awareness of the tradition of picture construction is subconsciously present." (Pettersson, 2005.) Brotherus' works remind the viewer of classical paintings (such as the works of Pierre Bonnard or Titian), but the way that Brotherus often uses her own body as a part of a composition adds the question of gender to the mix. Another connection between Brotherus' and my own practice is the deliberate use of art history and artists from the past as a source for our own material.

Bruce Nauman

What might be the most distinctive difference between my practice and Viola's is the fact that he is a media/video artist in quite the pure meaning of the word. Bill Viola does not belong to the other new art mediums born in the 1960s and which shaped the scene of (contemporary) art, but is purely a video artist not belonging to movements such as the influential Fluxus, conceptual art, process or performance art. Although Viola is continuing Nam June Paik's heritage he has created his own path. (Hanhard, 2015: 43.) Surely my practice using video and creating lens-based performances is part of that lineage as well, but my interest lies more in those medias to which Viola does not directly belong. I feel a strong connection to the traditions of avant-garde feminism

through early performance art made by women, Fluxus and the like, mostly because my aim is to uncover the flexibility and possibilities of performance art and video art.

I will now present a brief exploration of American artist Bruce Nauman (b.1941) – who uses video as one of his main medias – and describe how he has influenced my video performances. Specifically, I will focus directly on how some of his works have influenced pieces of mine developed during the research process, and on how my works resonate with Nauman’s works.

The most distinctive difference between Nauman and Viola – and my art and Viola’s videos – is how they are produced. This is not only coming from the fact that Nauman started his career in the early days when video was still a new medium and the technical possibilities much narrower than nowadays. Even in his latest works such as *Pencil Lift/Mr. Rogers* (2013), where several short pencils, each sharpened at both ends, are placed nose-to-nose in a line and suspended in the air – almost an impossible attempt to do – whilst a cat called Mr. Rogers is walking across the table and is captured in the video as well, are based more on an idea, even an attempt, to do something, than on the recording media’s possibilities. Van Bruggen points out how Nauman uses “simple materials”, such as chairs, floors, and wall corners in his videos, which takes away the possible monumental seriousness from the artworks, as well as giving a contrast to the possible technical sophistication of the video as medium (Van Bruggen, 1988: 23).

“Nauman’s willingness to let simple materials do the work allows him to avoid “monumental seriousness” and prevents him from becoming consumed by sophisticated techniques”. (Van Bruggen, 1988: 23) This, for me, is the biggest difference between Viola and Nauman, and also shows why my practice is closer to the attitude that

Nauman is expressing than to Viola's. Viola's pieces, in contrast, are indeed very monumental: slowing down the movement, working with the references from the history of art, displaying works like altars in church, and so on. I see my works balancing between this, the sense of being technically polished, and the emphasis on process: if there is a hint of monumentalism in my video *Mist*, it is mixed with humour and the DIY attitude: the mist is created by human muscles rather than the theatrical effects machine. Nauman's approach is closer to conceptual art, wherein the content and process matter more than the final piece or from what material the art is made. Bruce Nauman's video piece *Violin Tuned D E A D* (1968-1969) is a good example of how his practice resonates with how I have understood attempt, and worked with the DIY attitude within this practice-as-research project. He did not have any skill for playing the violin before making the piece, and the strings he used were D, E, A and D. The lack of skills did not matter, but Nauman's statement "recognize what you don't know and what you can do", added to his attitude, makes his approach close to an attempt: "Nauman believed that if he chose the right set of circumstances and structure, was serious enough about his activities, and worked hard at it, his performance would have merit." (Van Bruggen, 1988: 231.)

When showing my lens-based performances I am often asked why I do not perform some acts, for example *Hamish and Eeva I-II* (disc 1), live, or how I relate to video art and to performance art. I always find these questions difficult to answer because – as I have already attempted to describe earlier in this chapter – they both matter, but in their own distinct, equally important ways. The performances I create for the video need to be video pieces, and to justify this I often refer to what is said about Nauman's relation to the pieces made for still or film camera: film, being an optical illusion, gives a direct

relation to the artist's ideas, reducing the physical presence of the object or the performer that might otherwise take the focus away from the idea of the work (Van Bruggen, 1998: 225). This interpretation emphasises the conceptual aspect of Nauman's works. It also shows how the concept of the attempt is present in Nauman's practice – although this is not how Nauman directly terms what he is doing – in many of his pieces he is setting up a situation, using these “simple materials”, allowing the situation, when the camera is running, to create the possibility of something happening. He is testing what can be done with that time, and with those materials. This is also how I work – the camera is running, something is happening.

Although my decision to use a corner in the artworks in the Gwen John project comes from how John often painted corners in her interiors, and how I see that as an example of an intimate space, *An Attempt for Making of* (disc 2) can be also scrutinised alongside Bruce Nauman's *Wall/Floor Positions* (1968). It is an almost one hour long filmed performance in which he is taking different postures in front of a wall, himself being on the floor. The postures resemble minimalist sculpture, differing only in that the material is the performer's body instead of something inanimate, such as metal, for example. Nauman's video has influenced my use of space, especially corner space. Although the corner initially appeared from John's paintings, whilst placing myself in the corner, as I did in the performance of *An Attempt for Making of*, I was aware that this was something akin to what Nauman did in his video: studying the body in a space that is limited in size, giving to the body sculptural features, trying – or attempting – to discover the limits of body and how it relates to the space.

Attempts: John Baldessari & Bas Jan Ader

As I have said, although Nauman is not working with attempts *per se*, I see in his works a connection to that tradition, and I see this ‘trying-out’ attitude to be similar to the attempts I am working with in my practice – and which also provide the title for this research project. From the tradition of attempts I would like to give two artist examples: John Baldessari and Bas Jan Ader. American conceptual artist Baldessari (b.1931) made in 1973 a photographic series called *Throwing Three Balls in the Air to Get a Straight Line (Best of Thirty-Six Attempts)*, the final outcome of the project being an artist book which included 36 pictures. It is a collection of photographs of the artist trying to throw balls into the air in a straight line – which naturally is an impossible goal to achieve – as the title of the piece refers to. The act of throwing, the gesture, matters; it is present in the piece of art even though it is not visible in the final piece. Naming can be a place to make it visible. Baldessari has also played with extra body parts as props. His 2011 photograph *Dyptich part 1: Woman with third ear*, is literally a portrait of a young woman holding a fake ear next to her face in front of the ‘normal’ ear, which is hidden behind the long hair of the model. This is similar to the explorations I made when I was collaborating with choreographer Favela Vera Ortiz (disc 2), which also resonates with throwing the balls – trying to do something impossible, for example attempting positions which are not possible for the (at least untrained) human body.

Another artist working with attempts who has mattered is Dutch artist Bas Jan Ader (1942-1975). Again, he has not clearly named his pieces as attempts, but they contain a similar attitude within them, and his philosophical & conceptual approach makes it possible to see the value of an attempt as much as the final result, if not more so. Instead

of an attempt, Ader named some of his pieces using the word 'fall'. For example *Fall I* (1970) is a video piece where Ader is falling from the roof of his house. *Fall II* is filmed in Amsterdam and in this piece Ader is riding his bicycle – falling – straight into the canal. Ader is known for his attraction to word games and he was intrigued by the fact that the words 'fall' and 'fail' are so similarly spelled (Dumbadze, 2013: 17). If one understanding of the attempt within my research is to consider its wide adaptation of Ader's (whose works have influenced my practice long before this research project started) fall, this touches upon Heidegger's concept of *Verfallen* as Lepecki introduces it in the context of stillness in movement. According to Heidegger, being is connected to a certain kind of falling. For Heidegger the essence of the artwork is connected to this falling; there is a tension between a movement that is dragging down (like gravity) and the attempt to pull against it (Lepecki, 2006: 78). In German *Verfallen* means a movement that does not lead to anything. But it is not a negative feature. *Verfallen* is part of the attempt for constant progress that is characteristic of modernism. *Verfallen* is also connected to the stillness. It is not taking you anywhere, but it is everywhere, hence its stillness, its not-moving quality. All repetition and series are falling into the trap of temporality. (Lepecki, 2006: 63). In the end the attempt belongs to this same kind of reality of not being negative but rather being a place which holds a great deal of potential contained within a moment of temporality. The action matters. *Verfallen* relates to this very thing that Ader's art addresses: gravity. His attempts, just like Baldessari's throwing of the balls, are attempts against gravity, which of course is one of the actions doomed to failure.

La Ribot & Jérôme Bel

Within this research my approach towards performance art is connected to theories of dance and choreography. I have also created during the research process body- and movement-based (if movement is understood to include stillness) videos and performances. More precisely, I have explored forms of dance & choreography which are often referred to as conceptual dance. I have explored dance that slows down the movement – which is one of the traditional ontologies of dance – as well as dance practitioners who dwell at the intersection between choreography and visual art, and its history and philosophy. Two examples are Jérôme Bel and La Ribot. Both artists are dancers/choreographers, but their practices share a lot with the visual arts and performance arts. These artists have both been an influential force in this study of how the painterly and slowness can be shown in video and performance art.

A core aspect of French choreographer Jérôme Bel's (b.1964) whole career has been to question the tradition of dance and its representation. His works, as I have mentioned, have been an influential force within my research, and I have seen them all (except the latest one), either live or as a document as part of the archival studies undertaken during the research process. However, in the context of placing my practice within a lineage of discussions and artists, it is primarily the philosophical aspects of Bel's work that matter here for me. In my study I have explained how one of the research sources for *Kiss Me* (discs 4&5) was Woolf's autobiographical text and the line from it "who is the person to whom all this happens?" Jérôme Bel's pieces have mattered to this study in similar way to that which I will address with Serementakis' still act and Bachelard's slow

ontology in chapter 3, and my main source for this has been Andre Lepecki's book *Exhausting Dance: Performance and the Politics of Movement*.

One of the themes on which Bel's choreographic practice in the 1990s was focused was subjectivity and representation (Lepecki, 2006: 46). Again, here is a connection to my considerations of autobiography in the arts and in practice-as-research, which was one of the main components of the project *Kiss Me*. Bel's pieces *Nom Donné par l'Auther* (*Name given by author*) 1994, and *The Last Performance* 1998, are very much about this question. I find resonance with my pieces in this. In *The Last Performance* one and the same performer is announced to be Bel, Andre Agassi, and Hamlet. This kind of name-gaming, paronomasia, and the using of his own name as a choreographer on one of his dancers brings Bel's piece in touch with the questions that I have been asking during my research process, through autobiography: "who is the person to whom all this happens?", as Virginia Woolf asked in her autobiographical writing *A Sketch of the Past*. What is the difference between the private and the stage person? What kind of portraits of imagination do the art historians' interpretations create in historiography? However, whilst Bel is working with a dancer and is questioning how the dancer can be the choreographer's representative (Lepecki, 2006: 46), I within this research have been dealing with being a subject and an object, and what happens in that place where you use your own body as a representative of both your own biography and the biographies and even autobiographies of others. Bel's approach undresses all except the core of the dance, and in this respect he represents a continuation of the tradition of conceptual art. Bel is giving voice to the dancers, which is not at all usual in western dance tradition (Lepecki, 2006: 52). Bel is using slowness and stillness as a method. "This ontological slowing down initiates a different energetic project, a new regime of attention, as it

recasts the figure of the dancer and its subjectivity into new lines of potentiality for the political ontology of the choreographic at the moment of movement's ultimate exhaustion." (Lepecki, 2006: 64.), which is exactly what matters mostly for me and the way in which I see the power in stillness and slowness to be also outside of the realm of dance.

Spanish artist and choreographer La Ribot (b.1962) is another artist with a dance background who has influenced my study and how I see the power of stillness and even the connections between performance and still life paintings, especially in her *Distinguished pieces*. La Ribot is also an example of how my formal studies in art history have been an important resource for my artistic practice. The knowledge I have gathered through my studies of still life as a painting genre informed my way of making sense of La Ribot's approaches within her *Distinguished pieces*, in which she is almost creating still images, or at least still-like images, through performance compositions on stage. Other writers have argued that La Ribot creates fixed still photographs (Flórenz, 2002: 43). This idea would bring her practice in line with the tradition of *tableaux vivants* (I will be returning to *tableaux vivants* in chapter 3). I created a series with the name *Tableaux Vivants* (2006), in which I – the woman of the pieces – stepped in front of the Super 8 camera, struck a pose and stayed still until the film reel ended. The whole film reel (approximately three minutes long) was a complete piece, without any editing taking place after the filming. My *Tableaux Vivants* series (2006) was a springboard from which I worked towards a proposition for my PhD studies. So La Ribot's influence has been implicit – rather than explicit – in this research process, but nevertheless remains fundamentally important as a bridge between dance and my practice; still life and my study; art history and my research project.

Distinguished pieces is a series of performances that can happen either in a gallery space or in the theatre context (I experienced *Still Distinguished* in 2002 in Kiasma Theatre, Helsinki). The audience is invited onstage alongside the artist and all the performance props that she will be using during the piece. The length of each piece is between 30 seconds and 7 minutes. What fascinates me, and what resonates with my research into the similarities here between still life painting and performance, is the fact that the performer's body is very similar in status to the other props of the performance. In addition, before the work has begun, with all the props on stage it already feels like an installation with the still life elements, and the audience, walking into it, become part of it as much as the artist herself does. In the performance version that I saw, the evening began with the piece titled *Oh! Compositione nro 22* (1997). In this piece La Ribot walks to the stage, where she joins the audience who is already either sitting on the floor or standing up. She grabs a chair and places it in the middle of the space. She walks up to a wall on which are taped various different kinds of props for the performance. She removes a green dress from the wall and places it on the chair. She returns to the 'wall props' and this time takes a mug, placing it next to the chair and the dress. She then stands motionless next to the chair and these other props. Music (by Javier López de Guereña "*Oh! Sole*") begins playing and La Ribot starts to drink from the mug. When finished she throws the mug behind her and takes the dress from the chair, steps on the chair and covers her body with the dress whilst stretching her arms horizontally. She starts to scream, "OOOOO...". After a while she throws the dress away, steps down, and finally throws the chair away as well. Next she moves on to create another piece in the series with other props.

It could well be that without La Ribot's series, together with Lepecki's writings on stillness and slowness in dance, I might not have begun my investigations into the role of the stillness in my own practice. These inquiries eventually led me to identify these arresting similarities between two very different art genres: performance and still life painting, and eventually provided the strength behind my original contribution of knowledge for this research project, namely to uncover how multidisciplinary approaches both in practice and research can emphasise epistemological similarities between two different art forms.

Chapter 3: An Attempt to Juxtapose the Still Life Painting Genre and Stillness with Performance Art

As a genre, still life is impossible to define completely, as it has had many various names over the centuries, depending on the country and culture. For example, *Xenias*, as the still life-like paintings found in Pompei are called, differ immensely from Dadaist collages. To open up this complex tradition of the naming of still life paintings is a useful way to illustrate the various values that belong to the still life genre, as well as to underline how those values are also present both in performance art generally and in my practice specifically.

In the fourteenth century the term *cose natural*, which means *small things*, and things that belong to nature, was widely in use (Stewen, 2004: 18). In the fifteenth century, in the Low Countries, *still leven* was used, which then spread widely into other Germanic languages. *Leven* referred to the life or to the nature that is not moving, unlike figurative paintings or paintings about animals. Fifteenth-century French language used the terms *vie coye*, meaning *silent life*. Also the term *nature reposée* was in use. *Nature morte* became common as the understanding of still life grew wider to include death and things that are not (and have perhaps never been) alive. Another French term, *nature inanimée*, and the Germanic *Still Life* or *Stilleben*, reflect an expanding understanding of the genre, beyond *nature mort* (Sterling, 1981: 63-64).

In my first language, Finnish, which is where my understanding of the concept of still life originates from, the term used for still life – *asetelma* – is much more modern than its Latin and German equivalents. The first version of the Finnish for still life was

translated from the word still life, or more exactly silent life: *hiljaiselo*. The term *asetelma* became common only when modern tradition brought the concept of staging-up, of constructing the compositions of still lifes. After that there were cognisant attempts to find meanings for the genre (Stewen, 2004: 18). *Asetelma* is more serious about the subject, it lacks the playfulness or openness of the term that is still present in the term 'still life'. *Asetelma* is more set up, built up, staged – and the idea of nature has no place in it. As art historian Riikka Stewen describes: *asetelma* excludes the playfulness and the paradoxical relationship between the painting and reality which is present in 'silent life'. There is no distance and *out of reach*-ness in *asetelma*, unlike in the various other given-name versions (Stewen, 2004: 18).

Study for Colours (disc 2)



This short video is a study which is based on Gwen John's notebook in which she describes her use of colour in her paintings in written form. In the video I am juxtaposing natural lemon colour with the shades of Naples Yellow and Lemon Yellow (colours John also mentions). Each pigment manufacturer's colours differ ever so slightly from one another, so it is impossible to discern the exact colour shades John is describing. Similarly, still life as a genre is always eluding one single, exact meaning, as the history of the naming of the genre reveals.

The still life genre contains subgenres, and these too have names that add meaning to the tradition of the genre, both in terms of what is painted on the canvas, and in terms of the connotations of stillness that they invoke: *Memento mori*, ‘remember (that you have) to die’, *vanitas*, ‘meaningless’, symbolise how earthly possessions do not matter, and remind the viewer of the futility of pleasure and the transience of life. I will argue later how despite the fact that death and utter silence are woven into still life’s ontology, stillness is also still alive and active in many ways.

It was not until the second half of the nineteenth century, mostly because of the still lifes of Paul Cézanne (1839-1906), that silence and stillness expanded out to other painting genres (Stewen: 2004, 21). During the twentieth century this kind of understanding continued to develop and broaden out not only within the genre of painting itself, but also beyond painting and into other medias. One good example is that of time-based media such as performance and video art, within which the manipulation of time is often explored using, for example, suspension as a method for this manipulation. Despite the long history of still life paintings, and its echoes in contemporary art, still life has remained in the margins of the history of art. Only the last few decades have shown the expansion of literature emphasising the (theoretical) connections between contemporary art and the subjects of still life. It is notable this has mostly been happening in the form of art exhibition catalogues rather than in academic publications. Bryson’s study, which I am mostly relying on this text when writing about still life paintings, is one of the rare and (relatively) recent texts on still life that does not simply speak of any one specific exhibition or artist, but gives a deeper insight into the subject, and gives us tools to compare the still life genre with performance and live art.

The subjects of still life paintings are small, temporary, everyday moments. Live art often focuses on ideas that are temporary and transient (Stewen, 2004: 49). This is one significant feature that connects these two different art genres – performance/live art and painting/still life – which were born in very different times, and within very different cultural understandings of what art is. Still life has been the least appreciated of all painting genres. It has dwelt in relative obscurity, and can be seen as an ‘other-art’¹ of its own times. (Stewen, 2004:6).

In his book about still life, art historian Norman Bryson introduces the concepts of *rhopography* and *megalography*. He uses these terms to open up why still life paintings have remained for so long in the margins of art history. Figurative painting has long held the highest hierarchical status of the genres or painting. This genre contains historical subjects, stories of gods, heroic battles, all of which belong to the concept of *megalography*, opposite of which is *rhopography*. The term comes from the word *rhopos*, meaning trivial objects, small and meaningless subjects, objects that have been valued to be inconsequential (Bryson, 1990: 61). *Rhopography* dwells on the lowest rung of the ladder of painting genres, once again because of the value system that defines how the history of art is written.

While *megalography* puts the human figure at the centre, the human figure is (usually) missing in still life. This lack of a human body does not only mean physical absence.

¹ Riikka Stewen is a Finnish art historian and her text is connected to the cultural situation in Finland where so-called new art forms, such as performance art, were called *muu-taide*, or *other arts* in English. This came from the forms artists filled when applying for funding. Amongst the art forms such as painting and sculpture were ‘other-art’ for those working with more new art medias. In the 1980s, this finally resulted in the ‘other-artists’ having their own artists association department: it is still called MUU ry.

The values made present by human form, the personality of the human and the uniqueness of the human are also missing; so is a great deal of narrative force. Still, there are hints of the presence of the human in still life paintings: someone has placed the dishes, fruits, flower vases and flower arrangements onto the table; there might be leftovers of food on plates, the candle is recently extinguished and it is still smoking. This non-visible human figure is anonymous, and even gives an impression of an animality, although it is also human: everyone is hungry, all of us must eat. Still life reminds us that the human race is primitive and bound by hunger and routine (Bryson, 1990: 61). Similar themes are very often present in contemporary art. Examples of this can be found in the pieces I have made during this research.

Pizza (disc 12)



In the performance Pizza a woman is chewing and spitting out pizza slices into the bowl. The performance follows a short extract of the text from Eleanor Catton's book The Rehearsal.

The Candyfloss (disc 7)



In this video performance a woman is building a wig for herself from candyfloss and occasionally using spit to make it gluey.

In both *Pizza* and *Candyfloss* I am spitting out the already-chewed food making the primitive, still necessary act of eating visible. In both of these pieces I am present but in a manner which is different than my everyday personality or how I would behave in public. When am talking about my works, for example giving an artist talk, or writing a press release for an exhibition, I often use the terms “the woman in video”, “the person in the photograph”, instead of saying “I” in a picture. After my body has been used as a part of composition, it comes to mean something other than me, or ‘just’ me. My personality vanishes, or at least is not at the centre of the piece. The body comes to be a similar kind of trace to the other objects or things within the piece of art. Especially when I – the woman in videos – am/is still. The gesture of making a performer’s body still partly creates an illusion of the moving image being a still image, or at least lends the qualities of the still image to the moving image/film. According to the well-known theorist of gesture Giorgio Agamben, the gesture includes the action, but not the concepts, of *agere* (acting) or *facere* (doing). Gesture is neither production nor enactment: a poet writes a play, but is not performing it, the actor performs the play, but

does not make the complete play. A play becomes a gesture when a person takes responsibility for it and carries the weight of it (Agamben, 1993: 139-140). The way I am in my lens-based performances can be interpreted to be a picture-like presence. Alternatively, the way I am in these compositions made for camera could be interpreted as gestural rather than a picture.

This kind of holding of a pose offers an opportunity to make an intervention into the ontology of the movement-based art forms, for example dance or moving image, which then gives space for juxtaposing still life painting with the movement-based art, including performances made for film or video. André Lepecki has compared the stillness in movement to the theory of photography, and especially to Roland Barthes' notes on the *punctum* and the *studium*. For Lepecki, the stillness in movement-based works inflicts the same kind of wound, and 'teasing', that *punctum* does to photography (Lepecki, 2000: 334 & 362). By *studium* Barthes refers to something general about the picture/photography that triggers an interest for him (Barthes, 1981: 26). *Studium* can be seen immediately when looking at a photograph; it is the subject of a picture (Barthes, 1981: 49). It is, as Barthes puts it, coded – which is equal for me to the act of how my videos or photos are executed when I am making a composition, which creates the *studium* and gives space for the *punctum*. *Punctum*, in contrast to the *studium*, is a detail that punctuates the *studium* (Barthes, 1981: 26). For Barthes, what is essential about photography is how it always "holds the return of the dead" (Barthes, 1981: 9). I see *punctum* to be its own kind of death, pause and stillness in the picture, which brings the notion of death and ephemerality to be essential to camera-based art, as it is also essential in still life paintings.

The feelings of close proximity and intimacy in still lifes derive from the concept and gesture of the familiar: gestures and allusions that are connected to eating, or to how the objects are placed on the table. Gesture also has an ability to change the object into something other than what it actually is (Bryson, 1990: 71-72). For example, a still body in a lens-based performance becomes an object just like other objects, a trace just like other traces in the same composition. Often the gestures inside of still life paintings hint towards the human body, despite the fact that the physical presence of the body is absent. The metal objects and cutlery of Spanish painter Francisco Zurbarán's (1598-1664) still lifes refer to the body, especially upper-body action. These objects can be seen as direct extensions of the human body. As Bryson writes: the instruments (for example, cutlery) in still life painting are the muscles of the arm (Bryson, 1990: 72). This imagery resonates with my thoughts about how the body being still in performance can change its form and represent something other than it literally is.

The human body is not always absent from still life paintings. In the history of still life there are paintings where the human figure is present. The idea, which I too have carried up until now in this text, of there being exclusively non-figures in still lifes, derives at least partly from the way in which the hierarchies of painting genres have played out in art history. The presence of the human figure has been used as a valuing tool. Still life, being largely non-figurative, has been regarded as a less valuable genre than, as mentioned earlier for example, mythology paintings. Bryson, however, gives some examples of figurative paintings that have similarities with the still lifes. One of them is Dutch Genre painter Jan Steen's (circa 1626-1679) painting *The Disorderly Household*. (Bryson, 1990: 112.) I see this painting, dealing with the human figure, similarly to the way in which I have dealt with (my) body in my videos, with their close proximity to

the still life genre. Precisely speaking, *The Disorderly Household* is not still life, but a Dutch Genre painting, but there is a stillness derived from the way in which the human figures are composed within the painting. Steen has painted human figures as though they are objects amongst other objects in the room. It is very close to the gesture of what I am doing in my videos – being still, which is a tool for adding representational layers into the artworks. The stillness makes the body both present and absent at the same time. This effect can be juxtaposed with the concept of brackets. It is at the same time both removing something from and adding something to the original issue, in this case the body that is presented.

Studying the gestures of still lifes brings us back to the *rhopography*. The still life compositions have been interpreted as referring to the spaces and environments that are traditionally connected to the feminine, and have thus been seen to be less meaningful (Bryson, 1990: 137). Objects in still lifes belong to shopping, the home environment, often the kitchen. Gestures in still lifes refer to eating, and to the kind of presence that has been seen as banal or even primitive. The body in still lifes hints at something that is not graceful or ‘sacrificing’. The body in still life is occupied with the maintenance of life, and this culturally female, domestic territory refers to a feminine body and its capability of giving continuation to life.

The stillness or still life-like features I am presenting in my lens-based performances belong somewhere in between the picture-like and the gestural. In seeing this kind of stillness from the perspective of the gesture, Merleau-Ponty’s writings on Simone de Beauvoir find validity, as does his notion of the body having two meanings. The body is both passive and active, receiver and maker. To divide man and woman or sex and

gender from each other is not meaningful. They are tied together, and still life, with its 'feminine objects and gestures', exposes this to us. De Beauvoir wrote that pregnant or breast-feeding women are not simply returning the female body to the animal in nature. The woman's body during these moments and points in her life continues to be a human body, and she is simultaneously present as herself and as another (Heinämaa, 1996: 149-151). Many gestures I have made in my performances could be seen through de Beauvoir's thought. For example, the way I am present in my performances takes a gesture of stillness, or a gesture that refers to still lifes, thus giving space to the body to present something else other than just "my body"; myself and the other are both present. Similarly, within the 'feminine' still life paintings, the reality that is present is much more than just the objects captured on canvas. Essentially still lifes represent much more than the so-called '*megalographic* genre' does, as still life holds the humanity as complete.

One of still life painting's functions is to deal with the questions of the picture, and the possibilities of pictorial presentation (Stewen, 2004: 6). Still life is still a genre for contemporary painters to display the features that belong to the painting – both on the level of the painting act itself and in the process of representation – leaving the subject in the secondary position (Valjakka, 2007: 24-26). In the end what is on the canvas is paint, not apples, lemons or skulls. This feature is common for both my staged lens-based performances and the still life paintings – at the core of each of their ontologies is the desire to show something essential about the medium. To use still life methods in lens-based performances allows me to arrest time inside of a moving image, and to show how the lens-based performances are staged and created. In my works this method can be seen for example in the photographs of the *St Ives* series (disc 5) or in the *Pizza*

performance where I am making the use of the theatre tear stick, which is usually added behind the scenes to create tears in the eyes, visible, which emphasises the nature of stage-ness of those pieces.

An Attempt of Making of (disc 2)



A documentation picture from the performance showing how the process was visible for the audience. Everything happened in front of the audience in an open gallery exhibition space. In this picture technician Heikki Paasonen is helping me to create a composition for the performance that is based on Gwen John's notebooks writings in which she wrote several notes about the paintings that would includes roses.

The whole project *An Attempt of Making of* was based on the idea of staging, as the filming took place in front of the audience who were allowed to follow how the three video pieces were created. In *Candyfloss*, the gesture of building up something, a wig of candyfloss, matters more than the wig itself. In all of those pieces the process of making is as important as the final piece of art. This bears resemblance to the tradition of *tableaux vivants* (French for 'living pictures'), a popular social entertainment event in Victorian times (Hacklin, 2010: 54). In *tableaux vivants* the performer is 'transferring' the human body to represent a sculpture by being still. It was typical of *tableaux vivants* performances that they revealed the whole process of performance making. Some cases

where *tableaux vivants* took place had curtains reminiscent of the curtains of the theatre stage, which opened only after the performers had already taken their still positions. Most of the time *tableaux vivants*, being a common way to spend leisure time, happened in private homes, and the composition of the performance was made in front of the audience's eyes. They saw how performers changed from being themselves, a moving person, to being still and transforming from their daily presence into being part of the artwork. If no curtains were used, then there would be a sound or a change of light to mark the beginning of the performance (Chapman, 1996: 22-23.) The way *tableaux vivants* treats the person in a performance is not dissimilar to the role of the human in (traditional) still life painting: also in *tableaux vivants*, the performer becomes an object, but in a moment she/he will return to be him/herself again. In *tableaux vivants* this is very a bodily aspect, as the 'returning' happens when the physical ability to be still wears out. Saara Hacklin, the curator of the Finnish Museum of Contemporary Art, has analysed *Mist* (disc 7) and four older lens-based performances of mine (a series called *Tableaux Vivants* 2006) in the context of *tableaux vivants* and still life.

“Haikala's work indeed evokes an idea of a still life: not as the absence of but as the possibility of an event. *Tableaux Vivants* was originally shot in Super 8mm, a technique more or less obsolete by now. A certain element of time travel is indeed present. As if the artist were trying to afterwards illustrate situations that had taken place, or could have taken place? On the other hand, adding a person to the still lifes is a means of introducing an experiencer.” (Hacklin, 2010: 54-55.)

Using stillness and silence as methods in performance, the feeling of being nearby as well as intimate becomes present in 'this' present moment, which is close to how still

life painting deals with time. In some of my performances the way in which I work with time belongs to this discussion of representation. I am making time visible by focusing on duration. For example in the video performance *Mist* the length of the performance is defined by the muscular strength of the assistants using the water-squirting bottles. The assistants were outside of the frame of the picture, yet still their presence during the filming was essential and it defined the duration of the filming moment. The super 8 film's length in the project *Elle se sentait profondément honteuse* (disc 8) is the same as the length of film reel. In *Vie Coy (Citron)* (disc 7) I captured one second of each day during 30 days. In *Pizza* the reaction of the audience defined the length of the performance. The visibility of time in these film/video performances is artificial, each in its own way. In working with the duration and length of the piece as described above, I am making the rules of representation in performance visible. Amongst other elements of the performance I am also staging the time. If representation is made visible, the viewer gets an active role. By active here I do not mean only to participatory artworks. The method also works when looking at (still) pictures that have a staged nature, as it places the viewer, intellectually, into a similar kind of place as when looking at a *trompe l'œil* painting.

Mist (disc 7)



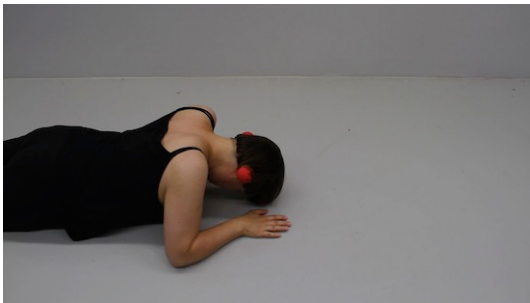
The two men squirting the water on me are not visible in the final piece even though their presence is vital for the piece and for how time is dealt with within it.

One subgenre of still life, *trompe l'œil* (meaning in French to ‘deceive the eye’), is based on the style of painting that gives an impression of a ‘picture in a picture’, or that which plays with perspective and optical illusion so that the result is a three dimensional painting which looks as much like the object it represents as the painting itself. In *trompe l'œil* paintings the question of representation is central: if there is nothing more than another picture behind the picture, how can the viewer trust that there is only one meaning in reality? If thinking literally, the only way to be sure there is a distinction between reality and the reality that the still life painting is presenting, especially in the case of a *trompe l'œil*, is to touch the painting (Stewen, 2004: 10). This gesture makes the human body – again – present, even if in an invisible way, in the still life painting.

Trompe l'œil paintings are intriguing because they may not look like paintings; the viewer might not realise he or she is looking at a staged painting (Stewen, 2004: 18). This gives a place for humour and playfulness in the still life genre – and is one such characteristic that is found both in still lifes and in my practice. The basic feature of humour is to show things differently from how we usually see them, or to change the context of the things or objects (Sánchez, 2004: 40). Humour can be used as a method to distinguish, and to play with the representation and the presentation. In my works the humour is visible in multiple ways – the issue itself is very negotiable, as different people find different things funny. For example in my works the humour comes from the method of using attempts, where I am trying to do something which is not natural or physiologically possible for a human body. In one of the video pieces done in

collaboration with the choreographer Favela Vera Ortiz, I am trying to slither. The absurdness of the ‘act which is not going anywhere’ that I am doing with the dancer Hamish in *Hamish and Eeva II* can manifest as humorous, even if humour was not something that I was aiming for. I have also used everyday objects in a manner that does not belong to the ‘normal’ use of those objects, such as in the video piece *A Cooking Pot* where the pot came to represent both the head of a human being and a drum. Or in *Candyfloss* where sticky sugar came to be hair.

Collaboration with Favela Vera Ortiz / An Attempt to Slither (disc 2)



Cooking Pot (disc 7)



Despite being an example of a piece with absurd humour, Cooking Pot is also a performance based on memory: before stepping in front of the camera, the woman is listening to a song, which she is trying to remember by drumming the cooking pot.

Film or video performance is similar to a cinematic genre. They are all time-based moving images that are possible to copy. This similarity between film and the moving image makes it possible to look at my videos, especially the ones that are shot on super 8 film, in the context of Walter Benjamin's *auratic* concept. According to Benjamin, art has always been reproducible, whether this be the copy the student made of a master's work, or a copy made with 'copying techniques', like for example woodcut (Benjamin, 1969: 218). It was after the new medias such as film arrived that auratic values started to decline. These new arrivals altered the balance between the original piece and the copy, which changes the nature of the art. Decadence of the aura does not mean that the aura disappears. It only shifts the unique sense of time and space to be visible in objects, as the theorist of photography Mika Elo underlines when writing about the objects in still life paintings (Elo, 2004: 72-73). There is also a connection between the touch and the aura. For Benjamin, aura means a unique 'place', in which time and space are embedded. The object might be close by, but the auratic quality of it makes it feel distant. Aura has a unique distance that is reminiscent of the phenomenon we might find when being in nature and observing a mountain range on the horizon. Then we are breathing in the auratic experience – we are part of the aura. (Benjamin, 1969: 222-223.) In performance art, its subgenre, lens-based performance, has this space where auratic distance and closeness are embedded to be inseparable. When looking at lens-based performance the viewer is watching something that has already happened, something that it is only possible to reach via the media the art form is about, something that is meant to be for the lens before the audience, and is meant to be recorded. Lens-based performance does also include the live moment, which is the moment when the recording is done, but this moment is distant from the viewer. Still, when watching a

lens-based performance the viewer becomes part of the unique moment. The moment and reality of the lens-based performance comes to be part of the moment of here and now. This is especially true if the lens-based performance is filmed on ‘old-fashioned’ film such as Super 8, as I have done in the *Elle se sentait profondément honteuse* series, because the film as material itself brings qualities which differ from the reality we are living with by distorting the colours and adding the texture from the film to the picture. Although this is more visible in films like super 8, it is valid with all lens-based pieces, as they are mechanical and there is the possibility of using the technical opportunities of the camera such as slowing down, post-editing etc. The moment of watching lens-based performance is also by its very nature a unique moment, as then the different levels of the aura are in one and same ephemeral moment.

Stillness in Lens-Based Performance

In my practice the stillness, the manipulation of time, is the place where the painterly happens. I will now argue how the still life painting genre shares some ontological features with performance, both lens-based and live. I am mostly using choreography studies as my referential literature, and more specifically literature that is about a dance which works against its own ontology, namely movement, by stopping it or slowing it down. This concept reinforces the method with which I have treated time in my practice with the videos that look like, and/or share equal amounts with still photography; in moving images, photographs, and gestures that are very small, if existing at all. This particular kind of method offers certain philosophical insight into the performance, particularly from a phenomenological perspective, by bringing the attention towards the essence of the art piece – its ontology – for example movement. Phenomenology is

interested in the world as it is given to us, without opinionated attitudes or questions about what is real or unreal. The focus in phenomenology is on the activity of the body and awareness, instead of focusing on existence itself (Heinämaa, 1996: 17). Saara Hacklin underlines how for Merleau-Ponty the body is the means of being in the world, and it is the body that gives us space or objects that are spatial (Hacklin, 2012: 24). Merleau-Ponty has also given an example of how the body should be more closely compared with an artwork than with the physical object, as the ideas of an artwork are given so that they are only possible to express by the display of colours or sounds (Merleau-Ponty's examples are (Cézanne's) painting and music) (Hacklin, 2012: 24).

“The body is to be compared, not to a physical object, but rather to a work of art. In a picture or a piece of music the idea is incommunicable by means other than the display of colours and sounds. Any analysis of Cézanne's work, if I have not seen his pictures, leaves me with a choice between several possible Cézannes, and it is the sight of the pictures which provides me with the only existing Cézanne, and therein the analyses find their full meaning.” (Merleau-Ponty, 1958: 174.)

This notion of phenomenology is close to how I consider art itself to be; there is something that is not possible to define in words. (I will come back to this notion when I am writing about the use of brackets in Virginia Woolf's *To The Lighthouse*, exploring how brackets have something in themselves, which is not presented clearly or literally as it is, even though it exists in there.)

Moving image that is close to still image, as most of my video works are, is a method that enables one to get closer to the stillness within the movement. To stop, or to create

an illusion of a stillness, or to use the painterly that originally belongs to the realm of still image, as a visual frame for performance-related art pieces – as all of those have been my methodology – is close to the arguments written about what is sometimes called *conceptual dance* – a dance that resists the traditional and classical forms of dance – and its attitude towards Modernism and its constant request of the movement. Lepecki's book *Exhausting Dance: Performance and the Politics of Movement* is based on this idea. Even though I work with the camera, its technical possibilities are less relevant for me than the bodily expressions and the presence of the body happening outside/in front of the camera, so I find theories from the dance and the choreography studies (indeed choreography itself can be understood as a form of writing) to be suitable reference material to theorise my practice. Conceptual dance has created a large body of writings (alongside Lepecki, for example Adrian Heathfield (2004) and Jenn Joy (2014) are thinkers on the subject that have influenced my thinking during the project) opening up the conceptual approaches to performance arts, and because the emphasis is on the conceptual, i.e. the essence of the artworks, these theories are relevant to all forms of performance art, not only dance-related pieces or artists. Many conceptual dancers also refer to the visual arts, like Spanish live artist, choreographer and performer La Ribot in her *Distinguished* series, which borrows from sculpture, installation and other gallery space works of art. Also the way in which the objects and props of her piece are installed in the space where the performance happens is close to how visual art is exhibited in art galleries: she invites the audience to be in the same space and on the same level as her and the props when experiencing *Distinguished*. As I have mentioned, La Ribot's performance of *Still Distinguished* that I saw in 2002 in Kiasma Theatre in Helsinki happened in the theatre space (unlike the Tate Modern's

version *Panoramix* which took place in the gallery space), but La Ribot treated the theatre space as if it were a gallery space by placing the audience on the stage with her.

The *still act* and the ontology of slowness are both valuable theoretical terms when uncovering similarities between still life paintings, performance art and moving image. My first encounter with the term still act was via Lepecki's writings. He borrows the term from the anthropologist C. Nadia Seremetakis who in her book *The Senses Still: Perception and Memory as Material Culture in Modernity* gives emphasis to the small everyday things, something that is seen to be *rhopographic*. For Seremetakis these small things affect how we shape our identities when remembering these moments. One of the examples Seremetakis gives is how the memory of food from childhood is carried with us for the whole of our lives (Seremetakis, 1994: 26-27). Seremetakis approaches the past by using everyday occurrences and personal memories. The still act enables the power within stillness. Still act could be described to be an active stillness. Despite being still it is moving, not onwards, but against the flow of time. Still act is small gestures, spaces, acts, things, and stories in cultural history that historiography has not paid attention to. If we were to pay attention to the still act, we would see how stillness is an opportunity to create something historically meaningful, because the still act stops the flow of the history, and expands the concept of history (Lepecki, 2006: 15). As Seremetakis puts it: "Stillness is the moment when the buried, the discarded, and the forgotten escape to the social surface of awareness like life-supporting oxygen." (Seremetakis, 1994: 12.)

Another helpful theoretic term for juxtaposing still life and performance art is the

‘ontology of slowness’, which is a concept coined by French philosopher Gaston Bachelard. For Bachelard, the ontology of slowness means being and not being (Bachelard, 2003: 430). This is the opposite of geometrical ontology, which for Bachelard is a spiral-like way of being where all is organised around the centre. According to Bachelard being a human is a way of being that is neither organised nor attached to anything. When something is expressed, that meaning already needs another expression (Bachelard, 2003: 435). This is why the lines of being cannot be drawn or captured onto the geometrical shape. If the centre were to be reached, we cannot know whether we can reach it again, whether it is still findable or whether it even exists anymore. For Bachelard, being is wandering and often this wandering is what is at the centre of being. The benefits of the ontology of slowness are that instead of geometrical forms, lights, sounds and temperatures, the building of pictures is possible. The process would be slower, but perhaps the process would be more meaningful (Bachelard, 2003: 436). In the slow ontology the final intuition does not exist, neither are there boundaries (Bachelard, 2003: 437).

The major point in the concept of Bachelard’s slow ontology and with the act of slowing down a movement in film (moving image) or in dance, is to emphasise the meaningfulness of slowness. When an artist slows down the movement, or creates slow pictures, she/he gives time and space for an audience to feel, to experience, to recognise the possible references that the art piece suggests. Bachelard’s arguments about the slowness are a calming thought for me, as someone who has been spending a lot of time finding out what to bring out from the visual research practice with the written words. It does not matter if the viewer does not receive the same points that I have been thinking of. The viewer is wandering inside the art piece, and maybe during the process she/he

finds a conclusion, and in the next moment realises another just as relevant conclusion as the previous one.

As both Bachelard and Seremetakis emphasise the haptic values of perception, I will give a short analysis of my video performance *Candyfloss* in light of those two concepts. This is also a place to remind us how the sense of touch, the haptic perception, is part of the allure of the subgenre of still life painting *trompe l'œil*. I see this to be one of those parts where still life and lens-based performance merge together.

Surely light and sound are important in live performance, but certainly the former, light, plays a crucial role in lens-based performances: photography is drawing with light – in Finnish it is even called *valokuva*, literally translated as light (*valo*) picture (*kuva*). It is easier to connect smell or taste, one of those features important in Seremetakis's still act, to the live performance than to a captured lens-based performance, but it is not entirely lacking from the latter. The viewer is not able to smell or taste the candyfloss in my video, but they can sense it by watching me eating it, and identify with it by using their own haptic-based memories of when and where they have had sugary floss moments. Both medias can include the notions of Bachelard's slow ontology and Seremetakis's values of haptic existence and the perception of the still act. Slowness in performance art offers a possibility to notify the small details, and to guide the perception of the viewer towards something that might not be noticeable at first glance. It is like a bracket within the visual arts. The sense of time in slowness is to be present in now-moment (Lepecki, 2000: 342).

Shooting – Death – The End – Vie Coye and Tomato

Vie Coye (Citron) (disc 7)



Vie Coye (Fin) (disc 7)



Tomato (disc 8)



The word 'shooting', which is often used when talking about the act of filming, is a violent expression. In two of the lens-based performances attached in the portfolio, I am

playing both with the notion of stillness in the moving image, and the 'photograph-ness' – still image-like impression – of moving image. *Vie Coye (Fin)* and *Tomato* (two versions, one filmed on super 8, the other on HD digital format), are both lens-based performances belonging to the larger realm of moving image. The stillness in these pieces derives from the making process, not from something that is added in the editing process. The camera is stationary on the tripod, and no zooming is happening. The performer in these videos is staying relatively still despite the fact that she is shot by fruits. This performer's gesture works as a metaphor for the act of shooting in a lens-based performance, when the performer puts her/himself again and again into the situation of being shot. Of course this is not physically a very violent act, if compared with some artworks from the history of performance, for example Chris Burden's performance *Shoot* (1971) where he shot himself in his arm. In my pieces the shooting happens on an intellectual level, if I am to use the same term I used when I was writing about the position of still life painting and its audience.

Vie Coye (Fin) is a sister piece for the *Vie Coye (Citron)*. *Vie Coye (Citron)* was filmed during one month. Each day I placed myself behind a table where there was a lemon still life arrangement, and made a small gesture, which the camera captured, including both the sound and the image. After 30 days I edited one second of each day's session, so the final piece is 30 seconds long. *Vie Coye* is filmed on digital camera as numeric data and transferred to DVD. The possibilities of editing have been used only for manipulating the time. I have not used any of the light or colour-correction options of the editing programme, so all the slight light changes between each day's clip are 'natural' (the room had a mix of natural and artificial lights). When I was filming myself the 'filmed me' became immortal, captured on video, and the time passing by

does not touch her in that reality. In real life she and the lemons were aging, and going through changes. One month is a short period of time in which to make those changes visible, so there is little perceivable change for the eyes of the viewer. When it comes to the lemons, that static, unchanging quality was reminiscent of the staged nature of old Dutch flower still lifes that brought together flowers that would not naturally be blooming in the same season. My shooting sessions of lemons took place in wintery Helsinki. The imported lemons were so full of preservatives that the natural decay could not take place. The ‘non-changing’ appearance of the performer, me, is a more complex question and for me it brings many levels of the photography’s ‘something has been’ to be part of the piece – even if it is ‘visible’ only for me, still there it is, somewhere inside of the piece. The filming took place in December 2009. My mother had passed away two months earlier. The silent gesture came partly from the feeling of emptiness I had inside of me – there were no proper sentences coming out of me, just a bodily sound that does not belong to the world of words. The way I worked and manipulated time in the process of *Vie Coye (Citron)* is close to animation. The difference is that I did not give space to any movement – animation – really, as each day’s clip was far too short for very much to happen. I treated the time and the sound similarly to the picture. A gesture in the video can be described to be an attempt to say something, to talk. Alongside the loss and the empty feeling I was experiencing at that time, I was thinking of those moments when I am with a group of people, having an animated discussion, and trying to add something into it, but not finding a place for my words, and the only thing to come out from my mouth is a tiny sound; almost like a burp. A sound not appreciable in social situations. But the sound is what makes it a film rather than a series of stills. According to film theorist Laura Mulvey, who has written about stillness in the cinema, photography – or more precisely photographic devices – are

disconnected from the human body. She writes of how the trace on a film or on a piece of photographic paper is a trace of something that has been in front of the lens. This mechanical process has no connection with the human eye, i.e. the human body. When digital devices started to become more common in the 1990s it signalled a return to the material connection between the object and the image. Mulvey sees the pre-cinematic practice to be bodily related with hand-painted colouring and hand-animated pictures. At the turn of the twentieth century separated animation became a genre of its own, while the cinema shifted into the role of the recording medium. The numerical times combine film and animation together again. Film is not then anymore the indexical technology of media but rather a subgenre of painting. (Mulvey, 2006: 19-20.)

The *Vie Coye* project and all the other art pieces done during the research process are staged/set-up situations. In *Vie Coye (Citron)* it is not only the lemons on table, the lights, the camera on the tripod that have a staged nature, but the way in which I am showing and treating time also embodies the same staged manner. The moment is unnatural. I am using the digital camera's capability to manipulate time. There is a shift happening between different layers of time, and between different art genres, between still life painting and performance art. It also gives *Vie Coye*, alongside the other pieces of the project, the qualities of the painterly.

Chapter 4. An Attempt to work alongside three artists from the past: Gwen John, Helene Schjerfbeck and Virginia Woolf

Virginia Woolf

Virginia Woolf's novel *To The Lighthouse* became important when I was working with the project that resulted in the performance-installation *Kiss Me* (disc 4) and the photo series *St Ives* (discs 5&4). *Kiss Me* is based on the life experiences of Finnish painter Helene Schjerfbeck (1862-1946), particularly her time spent in an art colony in St Ives. While I was researching more about Schjerfbeck's relationship with St Ives, I discovered that St Ives was Virginia Woolf's childhood summertime home, and that the geography of the events that take place in her novel *To The Lighthouse* is based on the town of St Ives, and the lighthouse opposite the town. These discoveries caused me to re-read the novel (the last time had been when I was in high school) and I was stunned when I noticed that the book itself, and especially the section entitled *Time Passes*, was precisely about the themes I was working with: time, stillness, being still, memory, death. I was also fascinated by Woolf's references to paintings. For example, one of the novel's main characters is a painter and the novel includes descriptions of her practice. Later when I studied more about the section *Time Passes*, I learned how the novel has a great amount in common with the visual arts. Alongside the novel, I also read about Woolf and her family's sojourns in St Ives, which led me to the pages of *Moments of Being, Unpublished Autobiographical Writings of Virginia Woolf*. All of these texts affected how *Kiss Me* and the photographic series *St Ives* developed.

I see this written part of the PhD to be a bracket within or alongside the artworks presented in the portfolio. My usage of this particular concept was inspired by Virginia Woolf's novel *To The Lighthouse*, and its *Time Passes* section which influenced the *Kiss Me/St Ives* projects. In *Time Passes* bracketing is multifaceted. Woolf's use of brackets – or crotchets, as literature studies call the square-shaped brackets she is using in *Time Passes* – is of remarkable relevance to my research project. Most of the brackets in *Time Passes* refer to death, or a loss. For me this fact connects the novel *To The Lighthouse* to the visual arts, especially the genre of still life; a genre that tells us how time passes by, and reminds us of our mortality. Below are two examples of how those themes are expressed inside *To The Lighthouse* in brackets:

[Here Mr. Carmichael, who was reading Virgil, blew out his candle. It was past midnight.] (Woolf, 2004: 121.)

[The sea without a stain on it, thought Lily Briscoe, still standing and looking out over the bay. The sea is stretched like silk across the bay. Distance had an extraordinary power; they had been swallowed up in it, she felt, they were gone for ever, they had become part of the nature of things. It was so calm; it was so quiet. The steamer itself has vanished, but the great scroll of smoke still hung in the air and drooped like a flag mournfully in valediction.] (Woolf, 2004: 179.)

() *Reading the brackets from To The Lighthouse's part 'Time Passes' I-II*

(disc 5)



Two photographs, preferably displayed as a pair, from the *St Ives* series, refer directly to the novel and its brackets. The photos are called: () *Reading the brackets from To The Lighthouse's part 'Time Passes' I-II*. In the first photograph a woman (me) is sitting on the rocks near the sea. She is holding an open book on her lap, and her gaze is directed towards the camera lens. When looking closely, one can see tears in her eyes and on her cheeks. These facts are not easily visible for a spectator, nor is the fact that the book she is holding is Woolf's *To The Lighthouse* – of course the name of the pair of photographs refers to this, but there is no 'photographic testimony', since neither the book cover nor the name of the book are visible. Hidden also is the fact that the photo shoot for this series actually took place at a seaside very familiar to Virginia Woolf from her childhood summers in St Ives. In part II of () *Reading the brackets*

from *To The Lighthouse's* part 'Time Passes' the composition is almost the same, except the woman's legs have moved from right to left. There is no book on her lap anymore. Her gaze is slightly off-camera while she is putting a tear stick – used sometimes by actors behind the scenes to irritate their eyes enough to make tears to come out – under one eye. In these pictures my aim was to refer loosely to the brackets of the novel. Not to illustrate what the brackets say but instead to refer to their atmosphere of longing, of sadness, of death. At the same time I wanted these pictures to show the process of the making of – and the constructed nature of – the works. The first picture (I) gives an impression being an art photograph, possibly taken by someone else (I took the photos alone using a tripod and the timer option on the camera) rather than the woman herself sitting on the rocks. Picture II ruins this impression and shows the staged nature of the series. It could still be 'just' an art photograph, but the atmosphere is exposed as a fake one by the use of a theatrical prop. These gestures can be seen as brackets within a text – showing some extra information, adding something more into the text – in this case into the photographs. Such are the brackets inside *To The Lighthouse*, which create a disturbing (but not negatively so) effect for the reader.

When I was studying the ways in which Virginia Woolf's use of brackets have been interpreted in literature studies, I found a connection with the discourse of the vertical and the horizontal. This is a concept with which I was familiar from the perspective of performance art history, where the terms are often used to describe American Abstract Expressionist painter Jackson Pollock's (1912-1956) action painting and his use of horizontal surfaces, which has been seen as a starting point for visually-related performance art practices. In Woolf's case the vertical is seen as a dynamic force, which is what the textual hierarchies, such as brackets and harmonies, are reaching for

(McLoughlin, 2014: 957). In art history the vertical and the horizontal have been interpreted as hierarchical structures. Young Walter Benjamin was the first to introduce those terms within the historiography of art history while he was writing about the relationship between painting and graphic art. Benjamin's conclusion was that pictures are vertical (a painting hanging on the wall) and signs are horizontal (writing paper lying on the table); i.e. the horizontal includes signs, the vertical includes objects (Benjamin, 2002: 82). In this light it is easy to see why the horizontal has been perceived of as belonging to the history of performance art. McLoughlin's argument that the vertical is a dynamic force coincides with Rosalind Krauss's argument – the most recent horizontal/vertical definition in the discipline of art history – that written signs, such as the words in Woolf's novel, are flat-bedded, and this is a place where culture reflects, and the horizontal surface connects (Krauss, 1997: 94).

Interestingly, some interpretations of Woolf's writings, and particularly her use of brackets, intertwine with the motives and compositions I have been working with. In the video piece *I was waiting for you (My Heart Will Go On)* (disc 7), I am reaching my arms out horizontally as though waiting for somebody to hold me. That was my intention, even though it was unlikely to happen, but the performative gesture created the possibility that something could potentially have happened; that during the time of filming, someone could have stepped behind me to help me to keep the posture. Another possible interpretation of that gesture is to imagine that the woman in the video is waiting for someone who is arriving by boat, with her arms in a wide-open welcoming hugging position. Woolf's brackets in *Time Passes* are described as arms that are stretched so that they are reaching out from the text towards the extra-textual world (McLoughlin, 2014: 957). The gesture of one of the novel's characters, Mr

Ramsay, as it is described in *Time Passes*, connects his pose with the idea of attempting to reach out to someone. Mr Ramsay, opening up his arms, is like a somatic desire to feel a body (McLoughlin, 2014: 960). In *I was waiting for you (My Heart Will Go On)* I was manipulating time and allowing the limits of my physical endurance to determine the length the video. I was standing on a pier with arms wide open so that the outline of my arms paralleled the horizontal line between the sky and the sea. My arms dropped slowly down as my strength wore out, breaking the equal horizontal line with both body and landscape. The possibility of physical touch with another body, the possible body that might have joined me, died away slowly while the time was running on. In light of the piece I have just described, and in the context of the whole of my study, I am very fond of Mr Ramsay opening up his arms, still standing and contemplating in spatial and temporal distance, as McLoughlin has described that act (McLoughlin, 2014: 961). In Woolf's words:

[Mr. Ramsay stumbling along a passage stretched his arms out one dark morning, but, Mrs. Ramsay having died rather suddenly the night before, he stretched his arms out. They remained empty.] (Woolf, 2004: 122.)

I was waiting for you (My Heart Will Go On) (disc 7)



One of the methods Woolf uses to describe the passing of time is through her references to death and to loss. This is the case with her brackets in *To The Lighthouse* and specifically the *Time Passes* section. Death and loss are written inside of the text in the form of brackets, which is something my photograph series () *Reading the brackets from To The Lighthouse's part 'Time Passes'* is referring to. Woolf's notions of time in *Time Passes* gives a sense of years rather than of hours. Time as well as the human activities in *Time Passes* are written in such a way that they give the impression of suspension. This kind of style has been interpreted as lyrical (McLoughlin, 2014: 958). It also seems that during *Time Passes* the characters of the novel are ignorant of the fact that time is passing. The moment in which they reside holds everything still. The movement of time is imperceptible (Banfield, 2003: 503). The notions of death Woolf has written inside her brackets are very descriptive; there is no space for the mourning. The mourning is present in the atmosphere, rather than in the direct references or descriptions of the feelings or actions. Woolf's brackets are described as a preservation, rather than a burial (McLoughlin, 2014: 961 & 959).

I see McLoughlin's following argument as a testimony to how many emotions there actually are inside of those brackets that mention deaths and losses. "The endless recurrence of war, the missing body: these are the reasons why mourning and valediction are indefinite. At the same time, passage evokes a sense in which all remains of the recent war have been obliterated – the 'sea without a stain on it' has replaced the 'purplish stain' that connotes the First World War in 'Time Passes' (1927, 207) – and Lily, 'still standing', is left to contemplate, in calmness and quietude, the 'extraordinary power' of both spatial and temporal distance." (McLoughlin, 2014: 961.)

In her diaries Woolf mentions that she was planning to write her father into the novel; to sit him in a boat, fishing for mackerel. Later Woolf was concerned that the novel had perhaps too many references to her parents, and actually Vanessa Bell, Virginia Woolf's sister, commented on how she found their parents on the pages of *To The Lighthouse*. Woolf's parents are present in the novel: they are like a bracket inside of the novel. (McLoughlin, 2014: 961.) In this sense the brackets become like crypts, which simultaneously deny the loss, and keep the death alive. This is possible if brackets are read to be 'as they are given' – vertically – which is free from hierarchy (McLoughlin, 2014: 951). Still, brackets are not free from the impression of the hierarchies inside of the text. With brackets the writer separates parts of the text from other parts of the text, which gives to bracketed material a special status. This status is close to how parentheses have been described by early grammarians to be 'additional, irrelevant, extraneous, subordinate, or damaging to the clarity of argument'. In spite of this parentheses are often original, relevant, central, emphatic, or indicative of the crux of argument. (McLoughlin, 2014: 954.)

The studies of Woolf and brackets also resonate with my interest in the correspondences of artists in the early twentieth century. The brackets in *Time Passes* have been compared to the First World War Field Service Post Card, which gave a chance for soldiers to cross out the options that did not match with their medical condition, when they sent messages home from war hospitals (McLoughlin, 2014: 957). The postcard reference also feels relevant to my practice, as the way the First World War Field Service Post Cards were composed reduced the personal experiences of those people who were sending them, and at the same time imbued the cards with so much hidden personal meaning and intention. In a similar way, I am 'me' performing in my pieces,

using my body and life experiences to be part of the composition, but still I am not the same ‘me’ than I am in everyday life. I will return to this theme later in this text when writing about autobiographical narrative.

Alongside the brackets and how they connect with the themes I have been working with, Virginia Woolf’s novel also serves as an example of an artwork outside of painting that has features of the painterly. The act of making a still life painting is very much about setting up. The arrangement of objects is required before there can be anything to paint – to capture – on the canvas. This is perhaps close to how a writer orders his/her words and configures the relationship between objects (McLoughlin, 2014: 951). How the receiver – the reader or viewer – interprets what is there – on the canvas, in a novel – is what gives a chance for the painterly, no matter what is the chosen method, to manifest. I.e. the painterly can happen outside of the realm of the painting.

The section *Time Passes* intrigued me not only because of its brackets, but also because of the atmosphere the chapter draws through the use of the words. Little action takes place, but there are notions of stillness, light, space – it is a kind of still life within a novel – and it holds the same sense of activity within stillness as the still life genre itself does. This multifaceted composition flows through the whole of Woolf’s novel, and gives it the space to belong to the realm of the painterly, as I understand the term conceptually both within this study and in my practice. Virginia Woolf belonged to the Bloomsbury Group, together with her painter sister Vanessa Bell, and compositionally *To The Lighthouse* has been read as representative of similar in attentions and ‘styles’ to those of the other Bloomsburians whose method was visual (i.e. painting) (McLoughlin,

2014: 952.) This multi-layered way of composing a piece attracts me. It is also something I aim for – and it is the reason why I find writing about (my own) arts practice to be sometimes so demanding: because there is *always* more that can be explained – many angles and points of view to explore. When writing about another’s art, or using others as a starting point for my own art – as I have done with Woolf, for example – it is easier to choose a particular point to hold on to. When talking about one’s own body of work, there is a danger that the words one uses will become words the spectator uses to see the work, which can then restrict the mind of the spectator.

Another connection between my interests and Woolf’s brackets is the question of time, and how it is, and can be, dealt with within the arts. Time and how it is manipulated within an artwork is also one of the features which connects Woolf’s writings and my artworks to the painterly. *To The Lighthouse* it is not the only novel where Woolf writes time into the text. It was quite typical for her to write a clock – more precisely a clock in which time is ticking – into the novel (Banfield, 2003: 475). This is another feature that brings Woolf as a writer close to the realm of the painterly, especially to the still life, in which temporality and the passing of time are part of the still life’s own ontology. Woolf has a way of giving the impression of time passing by describing for example small movements of water and air (Banfield, 2003: 475).

In *To The Lighthouse* Woolf writes about painting via one of the main characters in the novel, the painter Lily Briscoe. She is described in the novel (and one of the photographs from the St Ives photograph series refers to this description) like so: ”With her little Chinese eyes and her puckered-up face, she would never marry; one could not take her painting very seriously...” (Woolf, 1992: 25.)

”With her little Chinese eyes and her puckered-up face, she would never marry; one could not take her painting very seriously...” Virginia Woolf, *To The Lighthouse* (disc 5)



Woolf writes about the gestures of painting made by Lily Briscoe, although she never reveals nor describes the (content of the) paintings for us (McLoughlin, 2014: 954). Also the manner in which Woolf constructed the novel from short stories is painterly. This method of Woolf’s is directly connected to the visual arts and science (in terms of understanding different ways of seeing), and how the Impressionists and Post-Impressionists composed their paintings (Banfield, 2003: 476). One such possible reference for the painters of Woolf’s time who were composing painting scientifically is Paul Cézanne. I am using him as an example because his experiments with still lifes – the genre I have been working with within this study – are a perfect example of this. For Cézanne still life paintings offered the possibility of experimenting with the space so that the viewer was able to see many different perspectives at the same time. Colour, the material of paint, mattered more to him than the thing being painted. This kind of approach traces connections towards conceptual arts. For Cézanne, painting was about painting: not about what the painting represented. The paint material itself is what mattered. The way Cézanne dealt with time in his still lifes is an example of the modern understanding of time and space in the arts, and it had a direct affect on Impressionism

and Post-Impressionism, which have been seen as visual references to Woolf's novels.

To The Lighthouse again touches the painterly and still life. In (still life) painting on canvas it is the paints, not for example a fruit or a bottle, which are composed on canvas to represent something which means a fruit or a bottle, but can also have 'just' compositional values – the painterly values – autonomously keeping the composition coherent. Similarly, the lighthouse in Woolf's novel does not mean anything particularly special for her. It is there as a central line, holding the design together (Roe, 1990: 26).

Helene Schjerfbeck

***Kiss Me* (disc 4)**



*Documentation pictures from the performance installation Kiss Me in Kiasma-theatre
for /theatre.now Festival 17.10.2010*

The major type of texts that I used as a source for many of the art projects of this study are based on texts originally intended for private use: letters, diaries, notebooks and sketchbooks. They were never supposed to be seen by more than one pair of eyes, or at the maximum two pairs. In this section I will demonstrate how and why I have used these texts as part of my practice. My approach towards the letters I am referring to in this study is not to make final conclusions or arguments based on those letters, but to make visible the problematic act of ‘writing history’. I am also using the letters and the biographical facts of Helene Schjerfbeck and Gwen John as tools to construct performative works that have autobiographical traces.

Helene Schjerfbeck (1862-1946) is a Finnish painter, who had a long career that included many kinds of painting styles. She is known primarily for developing Modernist painting in the Finnish art scene, and for the large amount of self-portraits she made during her many years of painting. The latter, alongside her personal correspondence, has had the greatest impact on my interest towards Schjerfbeck. In her own time she held a place amongst other Finnish painters, but because of her gender, it is only since the 1980s that she has gained a deservedly more respected space. At the time of writing she is one of the most highly regarded Finnish painters on the international auction markets.

Helene Schjerfbeck, as with many of her contemporaries (especially if living or working abroad), wrote plentiful letters to family members, friends, and patrons. These letters

have long been a source of research for art historians. In recent years they have gained increasing attention from a wider audience as well. Some of the letters, or excerpts of them, have been published as elements of the biographies of the artists. This has always both disturbed and fascinated me, presenting as it does the opportunity for me to read something that is not supposed to be read by me. It might perhaps give extra background information (at least for art historians) on some of the artworks, but much of the detail found in the letters and diaries offers confusing thoughts for me, especially if the artist would have wished that the information be destroyed. This is the case with Helene Schjerfbeck, who wanted after her engagement was over for all of her correspondents to destroy all the letters where she mentions either her engagement or her fiancé; which would have left her fiancé's identity as a mystery. I tell of these details of Schjerfbeck and her fiancé, which are known from her survived letters, as a part of the *Kiss Me* performance installation, and the references to the information can be found in the supporting leaflet for this piece. In this text I only mention those facts which served as the reasons for my use of Schjerfbeck as a case study, and to show the kinship that I – having a British boyfriend whom I had met during my residency period in the UK, and having had an ill mother whose illness occupied my thoughts so deeply that it made working or any normal life demanding if not impossible – feel towards her.

Helene Schjerfbeck hoped that all her letters where she was referring to her short engagement to an Englishman would be destroyed. That fact was a starting point for the *Kiss Me/St Ives* project, in addition to the many facts in Schjerfbeck's biography that touched the life experiences I have been going through. For me, living abroad and engaging in artist residencies is an important part of the creative process. Helene Schjerfbeck worked in some of the artist colonies of her time, including St Ives and

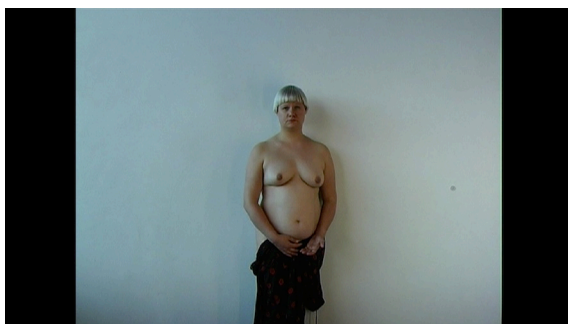
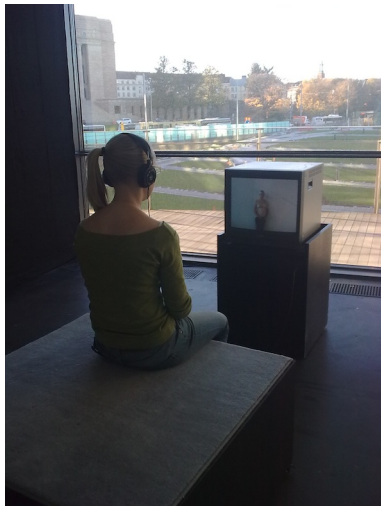
Bretagne. During her sojourn in France she met an Englishman and became engaged to him. This also added another ‘special’ element to her time in St Ives, because she was then in her fiancé’s country and culture, and was thinking of how her life would change were she to remain in England. The relationship did not last and, as I mentioned earlier, Schjerfbeck asked everyone to whom she had written about him to destroy their letters. The possibility of moving to England and living with a man or maybe even starting a family might have been a way for Schjerfbeck to tear herself away from her family ties. Being an unmarried, childless woman, Schjerfbeck was also a very present help for her aging mother. From reading her letters one feels very strongly that that in taking care of her mother her artistic practice was disturbed. This is still simply speculation, and belongs to an individual’s inner life – their unsolvable brackets – and we can never know how exactly it really was, but I am intrigued by these speculations when creating a narrative/history/biography of somebody’s life.

Gwen John

Gwen John (1876-1939) is a Welsh painter, and she is another female painter from the past who plays an important role within this study and who left behind numerous letters. My first encounter with Gwen John’s paintings took place in 2009, and this encounter later shaped a performance called *One-to-One* (disc 3). I was visiting the Tate Britain gallery in London and at the time there was a small room in which paintings by British female painters were being exhibited. Gwen John’s painting *Nude Girl*, and the adjacent educational text which described the painting, took my attention. The text read:

“The human body, a traditional theme in western art, was a tricky subject for women artists at the turn of the century because of questions of morality and decorum. By using a narrow colour range and minimal setting, and suppressing biographical details, John draws attention to the naked body. At the same time, the character of the model, Fenella Lovell, comes across powerfully. So the viewer experiences this painting, disconcertingly, as a portrait of a contemporary woman with no clothes on, who seems to be uncomfortable that we are looking at her.” (Tate Britain, 2010.)

One to One performance (disc 3)



Documentation pictures from Kiasma /Theatre.now Festival 12.10.2010.

Once again, here was a connection between a text and a visual art piece that seemed potentially problematic. It seemed very clearly to present the subjective values of the writer by providing instructions for how and what we should see in the painting. I was unable to identify in the painting some of the information that was given as fact – for example, the model in the painting does not look particularly uncomfortable to me – and so with this incident and the related feelings I experienced in Tate Britain gallery that day, I felt it necessary to research more deeply into Gwen John, which has led to an on-going journey with the subject. The sensation of reaching a human connection was similar to that which I had experienced with Schjerfbeck's material as I uncovered facts about John and the subjects of her works that felt familiar to me. It was intriguing to identify so closely with a painter that lived such a long time ago. Unlike with Schjerfbeck, this identification was not so much in terms of sympathetic facts-of-life occurrences, but rather with the *personality* of the artist (or at the very least with the personality that is discoverable through the writings both by and about her). Some of these I will illustrate more deeply in the text below, (and some others will receive just a mention here, hidden invisibly in my art pieces). The various text elements I have read about and by John – letters, biographies, her notebooks, mattered greatly and held influence over why Gwen John is still with me, and will stay with me long after this particular research period is complete.

Welsh-born John made Paris, and later Meudon, her homes. She learned a new language, and struggled with how to express herself in this language. Gwen John loved cats, and was unmarried. It would be no exaggeration for me to claim that I am known as 'mad-cat-lady' amongst my friends. Loving cats as I do, and being as I am without permanent address, I often find accommodation for myself as a cat-sitter. I do not have

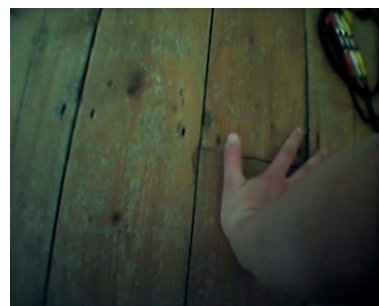
any children. Neither did Gwen John. Whilst I do not have overwhelmingly strong feelings about the issue, it is a fact that I am aware of, and which makes me sometimes feel like an outsider; although I am not sure if it is the fact I do not have children, or rather because of the nomadic lifestyle that I am living. Being a person who never felt the urge to reproduce, I do partly identify with John's words on the issue, although I do not see my art – or the cats – as my children. In one of her letters, John writes of how she does not understand people who bear children rather than practice an art (Roe, 2001: 58). Of course things are different now from how they were in Gwen John's time, with the availability of childcare, maternity leave and so on. Again, more than this issue I am interested in my practice in the fact that Gwen John reflected her identity through being an artist, being a model, and having Auguste Rodin as her love(r). For Gwen John, her feelings for Rodin, a fellow artist – and their *amitié*, as she referred to their relationship – were so strong that she saw them as akin to the strength of the bond between couples creating children together. These details of the workings of her personal emotional landscape are such facts as I can only gather through the process of researching Gwen John and her letters. And, as I have mentioned above, it is through such biographies that I identify a sense of sisterhood with a painter who lived and died more than 70 years ago.

For me, when looking at Gwen John's paintings, the familiarity is found through their intimacy. Most of the paintings are portraits of women, with quite few 'props'; or paintings of intimate rooms and spaces. Solitude is a word I would use to describe this feeling. It is impossible to say whether I choose the word solitude simply through the sense of the paintings, or how much it is affected by all the biographies available of Gwen John, and my research and discovery that she did indeed live a solitary life – and

cherish it – so that it can be seen to be an important part of her personality. This can also be identified in some of her paintings – interiors of the small flat where she lived in Paris. Spatially most of the compositions of my lens-based performances are sparse, filmed in the studio or, if in a pre-existing environment, very little of the space is shown in the final piece. When working with the Gwen John material, it became apparent that very often my compositions include or involve somehow a corner, in a space that very much belongs to somewhere that could be described as a *rhopographical*, a space that does not matter, or if it matters, then it does so in negative terms (such as the punishment space, as I am using the space in *Elle se sentait profondément honteuse* series (discs 8&9), or it can be seen as an intimate space amongst others at home, like boudoir or a bedroom – something I think Pierre Bonnard (1867-1947) – whose paintings have played an important part in the journey of how I ended up working with the concept of the painterly – has captured well in his paintings.² Exploring Gwen John and ‘her spaces’ both in literal and conceptual terms has led to further personal exploration of the concept of the corner, and it has become one of the main elements in some of my artworks. The corner can be seen in the *Elle se sentait profondément honteuse* series; in some Gwen John project pieces where I have placed my body either in a corner or under a ‘fake’ corner built up by two plywood boards with the hinge in the middle of them; and in *An Attempt to Retrieve the Past* (disc 6) where the stationary video camera is aimed towards the closed door – so that the whole video occurs like photography, as there is no movement – which resembles a corner, and also acts as a ‘dead corner’ with the closed door blocking the view of what is happening behind those doors.

² One of the first art pieces where I used the *attempt* in the name, *Five Attempts to Stay Still* (2007), was inspired by one of Bonnard’s paintings *Femme assoupie sur un lit ou L’Indolente* (1899)

An Attempt to Retrieve the Past (disc 6)



When in Paris I visited the buildings and streets Gwen John lived in and spent time in – ‘her spaces in Paris’. In the end very little came from these moments in comparison to the broader research process, but this is the nature of my practice-as-research process, as well as the creative processes as they work for me: thinking and testing, looking and searching. I had some sketches connected to those moments and spaces, but they never felt concrete enough to progress further. However, it did make me more aware of the concept of space and how I have been working with it during this study. For me space is very much about feelings and emotions; how we carry with us the spaces we have encountered during our lives. This is why Georges Perec’s *Species of Spaces* is so dear to me. I cite it directly in the beginning text of the video work *An Attempt to Retrieve a Past* in which I am attempting to retrieve a singular memory from my past and to bring that memory to the space which was my current dwelling space at the time of filming. The memory is spatial, it is connected to the moment when I was in my late teens, not really knowing what to do for a *métier*. I was somehow interested in performing as a choir singer throughout my school years, so I applied for a musical theatre course. Having no background in dance, being ‘not good’ in school sports, having low self-

esteem, the entry exam was nightmare at the time. The instructions I was given were: “The space is yours, do what you want”. In *An Attempt to Retrieve a Past* I am literally filling the dining room with the movement of my body but so that the body itself is never visible, because the camera was attached to my body, so it is filming the space in a manner that could be described to be drawing the space with the body movement. Although the space was a dining room, in the video it looks like a combination of a storage space and a studio space (all the equipment used for filming are visible in passing moments of film when the camera attached to the body briefly captures them). When the work was shown at the South Carelian Art Museum in Finland³ it was installed next to the ‘dancing room’ video, which was totally still. At the same time as I was moving in the space with the camera attached to my body, and with the microphone recording the action, another camera was aiming at the closed door which led to the space where the filming took place. In relation to Perec’s ideas about doors, the still image-like door is breaking the space in two. The other side, the side where the movement happens, is a private and domestic space, *my place* – as Perec calls it (Perec, 1997: 57). It is a space that is impossible for the viewer to enter, as much as it is impossible for me to really retrieve the moment I am referring to with the name of the installation. The way I am playing with the corner in the performance installation *An Attempt for Making of* (disc 2) and *Elle se sentait profondément honteuse* is similar to what Perec refers to as a space with no purpose at all (Perec, 1997: 33). In reality this would not be possible, it is the same kind of idea as to think ‘what am I thinking when I am not thinking’, but this functionless-ness offers a wide range of possibilities to play with. The action I am having with it gives meaning and function to the corner.

³ I made the piece when was invited to take part in the group exhibition called *Ihana Kamala Elämä, Suomalaista Valokuvataidetta (Lovely Wonderful Life, Finnish Photo and Video Art)*. All the participating artists are working, on some level, with autobiographical materials in their practices.

There is still one more fact uniting my practice-as-research with Gwen John's story. I have been researching how the painterly occurs outside of painting's own borders. Some of the projects belonging to my 'Gwen John' series draw from her paintings, but an equal amount of the works from the series draw from sculpting and sculptures. Surely there is a connection between those works and the tradition of *tableaux vivants*, but I have been also studying and thinking of Rodin's sculptures, mainly those where Gwen John, or other females, were modelling. Those sculptures have played an important part for me when working with choreographers and dancers. Much of this inspiration has been found in the piece *La Muse*, and the unfinished version of it (in the end the work was never finished), which is on display in Musée d'Orsay, and which I have been able to visit numerous times. One connection between this sculpture and the painterly is that *La Muse* was intended as an homage to the painter James McNeill Whistler, a friend of Rodin's, who passed away in 1903. Gwen John became Rodin's model, when he was looking for a model for the project. It is likely John and Rodin talked about Whistler's work, i.e. painting, as John also showed, and even planned, some of her paintings and drawings for Rodin (Roe, 2001: 51). This for me provides a connection with the intermediary concept of the painterly – of how one media and art genre affects other medias and art genres.

In the end, what most intrigued me about Gwen John was not her paintings, but her writings. Alongside writing letters, she also wrote notes in her sketchbooks. For John, writing was as important a method for sketching and developing painting ideas as her drawings were. She saw her letters as a work of art (Roe, 2001: 62). I do not find it necessary to go into great detail here about the romantic relationship between John and

Rodin; the powers of the relationship between the model and the artist are dealt with in the videos *Hamish and Eeva I-II* (disc 1). In this case too, my method has been to use the information I learned about John and Rodin's relationship and the themes deriving from it – such as power tensions between male and female, the question of being a model, being under somebody else's gaze, and how their relationship has been written and dealt with by art historians. The themes I have been scrutinising mostly have been the question of being a model, and the texts John wrote: her letters and notebooks. The former is a question I primarily deal with in my practice, the latter will be also argued in this text.

Since Auguste Rodin and Gwen John met, John wrote numerous letters to him. They are now kept in the Auguste Rodin Archives in Paris. Interestingly, there are only few letters from Rodin to John. Perhaps there were more that were destroyed during the time. The answer to this does not matter to me. After reading John's letters (reading as I did original letters, not only those which have been published), it soon became obvious that the act of writing the letters mattered for John as much, or maybe even more, as the correspondence itself did. The (latest) biographer of Gwen John, Sue Roe, whose books have been a main source, alongside the original letters and notebooks (I have also spent time in the Welsh National Library exploring original materials), notes how it is possible to see from archive materials that during the first years of John sending letters, Rodin read them all, but later felt it was meaningless; that John kept writing about same the subjects again and again (Roe, 2001: 62). Gwen John's letters reveal the details of her daily tasks, how she tidied her room, or went to buy a new dress, but they also give us a lot of information about the creative process. Not only the gestures and the acts of painting, drawing and writing – all three of which were creative acts for John, even

though her writings were not intended to be published – but the preparation for those, and her need for example to have her own, quiet space to work.

The letters of Gwen John reveal the kind of relationship which intrigues me also in a context of what happens to the performer's personality when she/he is in front of the audience, under the gaze of others, which relates to the question I wrote about in the part *Attempt to juxtapose still life painting genre and stillness with performance art* of this text. Gwen John is both a subject and an object, as she worked both as a painter who had models working for her, and also as a model herself sitting for other artists. This situation is similar to the position I put myself in when performing in front of a live audience, or in front of the camera lens. I am both a maker of and an object of my pieces. As a researcher writing about my own practice this situation rises even closer to the surface, just as it does when working as an artist with the self-portraits. Maria Tamboukou, Professor of Feminist Studies at the University of East London, analyses Gwen John's self-portrait *Self-portrait with a letter* (1907) in which John has painted herself holding a letter in her hand. Her mouth is a little open, which suggests she is about to say something (this gesture has a connection with the gesture I am doing in *Vie Coye (Citron)*). According to Tamboukou, John's painting opens up questions about to whom she is writing, and what the connection is between speaking and writing a letter (Tamboukou, 2010: 72). The latter in particular is an intriguing question when thinking about the connection between the text and the visual in my practice-as-research project. The visual artworks have a different kind of language from this text that I am writing here. I feel I am in a similar kind of position to John in her self-portrait, balancing between the two acts: writing and making visual artworks. Tamboukou also raises the question I have been exploring throughout this research process when thinking of how

relevant it is for we researchers/artists/art historians to read and use artists' texts which were meant to be private. Tamboukou forms this question well, when she is thinking of the self-portrait and the statement John herself has said, claiming that her letters are her conversations. Tamboukou asks: "Is it possible that fragmented sentences or phrases from her letters can fix anything about the meaning of her paintings?" (Tamboukou, 2010: 72.)

The essence of this question is the same, although differently framed, as the question I have been working on in both *Kiss Me* and the *Gwen John* project. Tamboukou finds one possible answer to that question by thinking of the act of writing a letter as an event – a notion that she raises from John's writings where John describes how writing a letter is 'a very important event' (Tamboukou, 2010: 72). Using this concept of the event Tamboukou enables (John's) letters to open up as forces of narrative, where words create images (Tamboukou, 2010: 73). The letters hold a message; they are part of her story.

If looking at John's need for solitude and the places she lived in London before moving to Paris, which were gloomy, and which she described to her brother Augustus John as "dungeons" (Tamboukou, 2010: 69), it is clear that she herself marginalised/deterritorialised herself, at least from the art circles of her own times. At the same time she never entirely left those art circles, and even when moving abroad she communicated with other artists, collectors, and family members via letters. John expressed a fear of speech, and the letters to Rodin can be seen as filling the gaps of her silence (Tamboukou, 2010: 72). The need to express herself through writing is close to the painterly, and how I have argued for the need to use words when transporting the

painting to another art genre. There is also another place for the painterly in John's letters, especially if they are seen as an event that gives space for narrative. John was a painter, and in one of her letters she mentions the difficulty she has in expressing herself in words. Her letters are interpreted to be always drafts. She re-wrote them; they include mentions of how bad her (French) language is; there is a sense of ambivalence in many of them. The letters give no closure to her narrative. (Tamboukou, 2010: 81.) So whilst the letters are revealing and useful for art history and the story of the artist, at the same time they also obscure, and lock in much more than can be revealed. The act/event of letter writing mirrors how the painter/artist works; rethinks, paints over, doubting the choices. I would call this letter-event of John's the painterly in writing.

As mentioned earlier, I do not find it necessary to delve too deeply into the relationship between John and Rodin, but still there are certain points that strike out and work as sources for my practice – especially for the pieces *Hamish and Eeva I and II*. John's letters show that although she did indeed commit some tiny desperate acts – like waiting at the train station for Rodin to return from his countryside home without even knowing when he might be back – she was an independent woman, who made her own decisions, despite the fact that her letters are described to be schoolgirl-like (Lloyd-Morgan, 2004: 13). The relationship between her and Rodin nourished her creativity, she shared her thoughts about painting with him, she learned from him, and the way she wrote shows she was reflecting on her personality and way of being in the world through her letters. Amongst the piles of John's letters written to Rodin, the most interesting were those letters where John referred to Rodin in the third person instead of using his name. Auguste Rodin called Gwen, whose full name was Gwendolen Mary John, Marie. Maybe because it was difficult for him as a French speaker with little knowledge of

English to pronounce Gwen, or maybe because shy and petite Gwen John reminded him of his little sister Maria, who had died in her twenties, and sometimes Rodin is known to use '*ma petite sœur*' when meaning Gwen John. Indeed there was a 36-year age difference between Auguste Rodin and Gwen John. John referred to Rodin in most of her letters as "*maître*" (master). (Roe, 2001: 50.) However, amongst John's letters to Rodin are letters that John addressed to Julie, even though the recipient was and was meant to be Auguste Rodin. In her letter John describes how the gesture of using the third person makes her more daring than she otherwise would be, had she been writing directly to Rodin (Tamboukou, 2010: 82). The method of writing in the third person is more connected to an academic text or an objective narrator of a novel, than to a text that is taking a form of a correspondence or other personal type of text. This underlines my argument of the way in which the writing mattered to John, and how irrelevant the power dynamics between the two lovers really are when thinking of her creative process. John was writing about her own narrative. Ultimately, she was in charge. The name-playing John is doing makes the name that is mentioned significant, and masks other possible narratives (Tamboukou, 2010: 82-83). By doing so John is creating a character for and of herself, one which differs from the everyday Gwen John. This situation is similar to the role I take in front of the camera. It is not 'me', even at the same time as it is 'me', bound up with my life experiences. Of course this is similar with actors, and all other performers, but in performance it is mostly even more relevant, as the performer (usually) does not use acting methods etc. My 'method' when performing is usually to keep a deadpan facial expression to give space for the viewer's own interpretations, and just to use my body as a platform for the issues I am showing/presenting in the performance – this role is quite similar to how I see the use of theories or historiography as a methodology in my practice. I more show, make things

visible, than manifest issues in my works. The deadpan face also alienates the woman on the stage/in front of the camera from everyday Eeva-Mari. It is notable that John quite possibly did not do so deliberately, or with intention. Researchers have later interpreted John's gestures to be doing so, by using her own texts as their research method. Within this study I played with a similar kind of attitude to John's 'naming game'. The photographic series *Sulky Face* (disc 3) was a play about the emotions and expressions of the face, while the piece was also a reference to John's painting of the same name. In two lens-based performances, () *photos* and *Pizza* (disc 12), I have been fake-crying using the theatrical tear-stick to induce tears, as I mentioned previously when describing the staged nature of those performances.

54 Attempts for Sulky Face (disc 3)



This kind of 'role-playing' that has echoes in Gwen John's use of different names is at the core of the autobiography, where my performances also belong – some more than others – and it is a question that is very present in my practice. Alongside the Schjerfbeck and *St Ives* connections, *Kiss Me* is built around a question and a specific memory that Virginia Woolf is writing in her memoir. "Who is this person in the memoirs to whom all this happens? Memoirs are mostly about what happened, not what the person was like when all this happened" (Woolf, 1976: 65). The memory is of an

incident that Woolf describes as taking place in her childhood summerhouse in St Ives. She was touched by an adult man in an unacceptable way. Woolf writes of how wrong the touching felt, and how she still could recall it almost 50 years later, and that these facts prove that she was not actually born in 1882, but thousands of generations before, as this feeling of something being wrong is instinctive (Woolf, 1976: 69). For me this statement of Woolf's proves how using autobiographical material as a part of an art piece is not just about the person who is the author – the themes are wider and touch the core of humanity. That is why I identify with the artists who have been here long before me. That is why I mix my own experiences and memories with other people, or make them a part of the composition of the pieces I make. As Barthes puts it: "the past coincides with the present" (Barthes, 1975: 56).

The use of autobiographical material made me want to invite Bobby Baker to be part of my upgrading process from MPhil to PhD in 2011. Bobby Baker starts each performance with the words "I am Bobby Baker". Her presence and her utterance together make it clear that she is a female despite her ambiguously-gendered name. During the performance she talks to or refers to herself in the form of 'I' and 'me'. She has described the transition that takes place when she is performing: "I step on stage, I start performing, I become something else" (Heddon, 2008: 42). In my upgrading performative lecture Baker and I were having a discussion about the use of one's own experiences in art while the documentation of *Kiss Me* was screened in the background. The ways Baker uses her own stories in her performances are related to many other autobiographical performances – it is a common method in performance art. As professor of performance studies Deidre Heddon writes, there are at least two Bobby Bakers – the one that is performing and the non-performing Bobby Baker. This mixes

the question of whose stories are told on a stage: Bobby Baker performing subjects or Bobby Baker the performed subjects. (Heddon, 2008: 41-43.) By confusing the roles, and at the same time drawing from and drawing out of her everyday persona, Baker manages to make those themes visible that the piece is about. As she said in her performance *Drawing On a (Grand) Mother's Experience*, which was a re-version of her piece *Drawing on a Mother's Experience* premiered in 1998, when she was talking about how her piece has been analysed, "This is not about me, this is about (being) a mother" (Baker, 2015).

Chapter 5. An Attempt for Epilogue: Hamish and Eeva

Hamish and Eeva I (disc 1)



Hamish and Eeva II (disc 1)



The final art piece created for this research project was the video work titled *Hamish and Eeva I-II* (2015). These two pieces serve as an epilogue to the text: they take the information and experience gathered in this project and draw it to a certain conclusion. Furthermore, *Hamish and Eeva I-II* represent an encounter with what is to come, a springboard into the practice that will follow this research project: they establish a continuing exploration into the multidisciplinary possibilities of movement and body based lens-based performances. For the sake of this springboard-nature of the pieces, in the portfolio they will be to be found at the beginning.

Hamish and Eeva I-II address the themes of memory and remembering, which is directly connected with the still lifes. These final pieces are also informed by thoughts of longing and loving, much like the love of Gwen for her Auguste, and her longing to spend as much time as possible with him. Recounting this longing, these themes of presence and absence, *Hamish and Eeva I* makes my body simultaneously present and absent in the work. Before stepping in front of the camera in *Hamish and Eeva I* the dancer Hamish MacPherson touched my body for around ten minutes. He touched with the aim of remembering my body, so that when he went in front of the camera, he would then try to draw and sculpt my body with his hands, such as he remembered the moment of touching to be. In this way, I am placed into the film through Hamish's memory, even though physically I am not there.

Hamish and Eeva II is based on my understanding of the relationship between Gwen John and Auguste Rodin – in which John was an active actor/operator – and how much the relationship meant to her, and impacted her confidence and daily routines as an artist. The question is not an easy one, as there are many complicated and contradictory elements, such as the age gap between the two; Rodin's fame and reputation amongst women; the fact that female artists were far less respected and valued than male artists in those days; Gwen John's role as a model, which is a passive role, for Rodin. In order to grapple with these contradictions I decided to employ the tactical method of working with a male dancer of a similar age to me, and physically relatively compatible with me, so that our movement would not give the impression of the male, who apparently is physically stronger than a female, as holding the power. The movements (the task was to pull the other's body close at the very same time as pushing it away) taking place in

Hamish and Eeva II were physically demanding for both of us. Creating this kind of situation more than hints at my thoughts on the nature of written words about an arts practice. I am offering to the viewer a suggestion, an attempt, of something that I wish to highlight and raise into question, rather than present as fact. Just as we can never quite know exactly how somebody feels, or hope to fully understand the intimate life between two people, I wanted to create a movement that has no clear sense of direction, aim or goal, even though there is considerable and articulate tension going on. The result is a struggle, although perhaps this word does not do justice to what is taking place. As Merleau-Ponty describes, perhaps the capability that an artwork has to express itself is only truly manifested through the artwork's own 'language' (Hacklin, 2012: 24).

From time to time, especially towards the end, the man and woman are disappearing into the dim edges of the space. There is only breathing left.

This written body of the thesis breathes alongside the portfolio. There is not one without another. Still, alongside the portfolio, from time to time, this text disappears into the dim edges of the space, giving room and voice for the visual artistic research practice.

Portfolio

GWEN JOHN PROJECT

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Hamish and Eeva I-II (2015)

Two video performances

Hamish and Eeva I (Duration 10 min 51 sec)

Hamish and Eeva II (Duration 21 min 16 sec)

This media is on disc 1

Pictures (p. 106) and discussion in written part of the thesis: Chapter 5 (p. 106)

The dancer who is performing in *Hamish and Eeva I* is Hamish MacPherson. Before stepping in front of the camera, he was touching my body in such a way that he would remember that moment and how my body felt. In front of the camera he is drawing my body with his hands and the movements of his body, as he remembers it.

In the video *Hamish and Eeva II*, a man and a woman are struggling on a stage. From time to time they disappear into the dim edges of the space.

Both pieces are video performances, which are based on the Welsh painter Gwen John's (1876-1939) letters and notebooks, as well as referencing the fact that John both worked as a model for other artists and used models in her own art practice. Texts written by John reminded me of issues of loneliness and longing, and led me to the consideration of how to express bodily these fragile themes. The nature of these texts, letters and notebooks, which were originally intended for private use, in addition to the fact of John's romantic relationship with Auguste Rodin (1840-1917), whose model she was, informed and affected the dynamic that I was searching for between the dancer and myself.

Both pieces are also inquiries into how sculpture, painting and performance relate to the camera.

I was using two books as a visual source when explaining my ideas to Hamish. These books are:

Marraud, Hélène 2011. *Rodin. Revealing Hands*. Éditions of Musée Rodin, Paris.

Musée Rodin (ed.) 1995. *Rodin, Whistler et la Muse*. Musée Rodin, Paris.

An Attempt for Making of (2012)

Part I-II

Photography documentation of live performance at Kiasma Theatre Helsinki

This media is on disc 2

Pictures (p. 60) and discussion in written part of the thesis: Chapter 3 (p. 50)

These performances were part of the *Performance Compost* event at Kiasma theatre's /*theatre.now – festival*. The concept of the event was to investigate how performance and document works together. The event was part of the Kiasma Museum of Contemporary Art's *Reality Bites* (2.11.2012-10.3.2013) exhibition. Key questions published for the whole event were: "Can performances be institutionalised, and if so, how? In what types of documents can a performance be encapsulated? What is the role of documents in performance art? Can performance documentation serve as material for new performances? How can the boundary between fact and fiction be blurred in a performance?"

Another important aspect of the *Performance Compost* was that it happened in a gallery space and therefore partly took the form of visual art. The changes of the artists and pieces were rapid. During one month around 30 artists invaded three rooms of the Kiasma Museum of Contemporary Art. During the same day, in the same space, many things happened – performances, lectures, presentations, installations, gigs and exercises. Alongside this, documentations of old performances in the Kiasma Theatre were also on show.

My slot was two hours long on the Thursday and three hours long on the Saturday. The time slots included setting up before the performance and tidying away afterwards. The idea for my performance was based on two questions: how to use archive and historical material as a background for a performance, and what can the painterly mean in the context of performance art? The title *An Attempt for Making of* referred to the attitude I had towards the whole *Performance Compost* event, as well as to my piece within it. I was testing a new idea, putting something in the compost to ferment, hoping it would work as a background for something; that ‘something’ I also wanted to keep open. I have also named some of my earlier pieces with the word ‘an attempt’. I like how a title which includes the word ‘attempt’ refers to potential, to something which might happen, to something which in its nature is performative. The other part of the title – i.e. ‘*Making of*’ – comes from Gwen John’s notes, as she had written a list ‘Making of the portrait’ in her notebook. About a month before the event at Kiasma I had made a performance in Sweden which borrowed its title from one of John’s lists and was based on the main idea of that list: being a model. *An Attempt for Making of* was kind of a sister piece for the *Making of the Portrait*, they both belong to my larger project, *Gwen John*. I also think ‘an attempt’ is well-suited to the study project – I am testing whether the research questions work in art pieces and in creative practice.

The following is the information leaflet (as indicated between asterisks below) that was given to the audience:

**

Part I

An Attempt for Making of

Part I

How to use archive and historical material as a background for a performance? Or what can the painterly mean in the context of performance art?

In Gwen John's paintings the models (often females) are usually situated in the corner of the room.

1.

This performance is an attempt to fit a woman into a corner. She is taking the role of the model in front of the camera lens and is trying to be still in an awkward position for as long as she can.

This piece is an homage to Gwen John, who used to sit as a model for many fellow artists in her own time (including her lover Auguste Rodin), and for all artist's models.

2.

The list read during this performance is from Gwen John's notebook.

We do not know why and what she meant by this list. We can only guess.

3.

This performance is based on another list from Gwen John's notebooks. She wrote several notes for a painting that would have white roses in it. I am using the latest one of those, where the subject is not mentioned at all.

Thank you: Mikko Kuorinki (the photographer), Ida Pimenoff, Ian Stonehouse, Kati Kivinen & Kiasman mestarit, Finnish Cultural Foundation, curators of the Performance Compost and the whole team of Kiasma-theatre.

Bibliography: Roe, Sue (2002). Gwen John. A Life. Vintage, London.

**

At the start I refer to the fact given in many books about Gwen John that her models are often situated in the corner of the room. The corner is also relevant in other contexts of John's life and art. One of her most well-known paintings is *A Corner of the Artist's Room in Paris*, and before getting her own house in France, John's tiny Paris flats could be described to be like corners. Her own place and time were very important to her, and that is one of those facts which led me to work with her biography.

I had an artist, Mikko Kuorinki, working as my cameraman during that hour (Mikko was familiar with the Gwen John project as he was a curator for the Malmö event where he also documented my piece). My idea for *An Attempt for Making of Part I* expanded Mikko's role beyond being just camera operator. The performance (which could be

called also 'event', 'happening', 'open filming session') was me doing three performances foremost for the camera, not for the audience that was invited to follow the process. The audience was able to follow the artist in her work creating a new piece, and at the same time the situation was a platform for me to test something new and different from my previous practice. As the whole process of setting up the props, testing lights, working with the camera angle and so on happened in front of the audience, the camera man was in the spotlight with me. We were both performing. Mikko had also a big role technically with the other technical staff provided by Kiasma theatre. Together we checked the lights, did test photographs and so on. All this was open to the audience to follow. I announced the start of the 'real' performance, the filming sessions of three performances mentioned on the leaflet, by saying my name, the names of my technical assistants (Mikko for camera, Heikki Paasonen for lights) and briefly introducing what would happen during the piece. Mikko and I had deliberately left some questions unsolved, such as the final camera angle, before the final filming in order to make it more of a real situation instead of a completely rehearsed performance.

The first performance was described in the following way: "This performance is an attempt to fit a woman into a corner. She is taking the role of the model in front of the camera lens and is trying to be still in an awkward position as long as she can. This piece is an homage to Gwen John, who used to sit as a model for many fellow artists in her own times, including her lover Auguste Rodin, and to all artist's models."

I went to stand in the corner, facing the wall. After standing still for a while I started to sit down, putting my right leg down straight. When I had stretched it as straight as I

could I placed the left leg next to the right, putting my bodyweight on my arms, which were in an awkward position. The posture reminded me of the 'push-up' posture at a gym, except my palms were at the same angle as the corner, with each hand's fingers facing one another. The idea, which I tested with Mikko before the final filming, was that the line of the corner would be the same as the middle line of my body, measured from my bottom crease. I stayed in that posture as long as my strength let me (this was about 3'30"). I didn't go to the extremes of my body strength's limit, I finished when it felt almost unbearable but not quite. The breathing was loud and it was creating an intense atmosphere in the room while I was trying to have energy to stay still.

After each performance the audience saw all the changes of the lights and other technical things, me stretching, etc. The focus of these actions was not aimed towards the audience but it happened between Mikko, Heikki and me. Also the composition of the props and the filming positions were planned for the camera not for the live audience.

The second piece was described in the programme in the following way: "The list read during this performance is from Gwen John's notebook. We do not know why and what she meant by this list. We can only guess." For the performance I placed a fake corner (made of plywood painted white with hinges) in front of the Kiasma's white wall. I went under the corner on my knees so that the weight of the wooden structure was resting partly on my back and partly on my arms. I placed a copy of Gwen John's biography in front of me and repeatedly read the list from the book. While reading the list, my body went up and down lifting the corner up as much I could without the corner's sides losing contact with the floor. The movement was reminiscent of breathing.

The length of the performance was 10 minutes, which was the maximum duration that the camera memory card was able to record. This is Gwen John's list that I was reading repeatedly:

3 tables

1 armoire à glace

2 glaces

1 sommier

1 lit en fer

4 chaises

4 chaises en osier

1 elagère

1 rechaud à gaz

a petite table

2 petits tabourets

vaisselle

utensils de cuisine

bouteilles

chiffons

placard

(Roe, 2002: 209.)

The third performance was also based on John's list. The description was: "This performance is based on another list from Gwen John's notebooks. She wrote several

notes for a painting that would have white rose(s) in it. I am using the latest one of those, where the subject is not mentioned at all”.

I used the same plywood corner I did for the second performance. I placed the white rose in the middle of the right-hand side of the corner's surface, and seven acrylic colour tubes on both sides of the rose. This took place in the grey area between setting-up and performing. Technician Heikki was helping me to tape the rose to the wall and we also communicated about the lights and other compositional questions. The performance recorded on camera was a quick action. I walked very close to the corner side. With each step my foot pressed on a paint tube so that the colour was spread to the corner's surface. The colours I used were from John's list used as an inspiration for this piece. I tried to find colours from the art supply shop which would match as closely as possible the colours John used in her time.⁴

An Attempt for Making of Part II

The key question of *An Attempt for Making of Part II* was how to document something that is already gone? The questions within Part II developed questions for the whole piece – how to use archive and historical material as a background for a performance and what can the painterly mean in the context of performance art? At the same time the Part II key question is something that is behind the whole Gwen John project (and my artistic practice in general), and of course it was something the whole event of

⁴ Placing the rose on the corner wall was reminiscent of the action of leaving a flower for someone who has passed away. This performance fits other pieces made during the research process because of its reference to the memory, remembering, something lost – and in general to an attempt to return to somewhere that is already gone, which was the Part II key question.

Performance Compost was asking. I made several attempts which took the form of the (performance) installation.

For Part II I again had an information leaflet for the audience to read. Here is the leaflet plus the concrete description of what happened. (*Text in italics from the programme.*)

1.

“To bring a documentation of the performance to the same space where the performance on the video happened. (x 2)”

I had video documentations/video performances from Part I installed in the same location where they took place. The performance which I made first in Part I (the one where I am in an awkward position in the corner) was on a TV monitor in front of the same corner where the performance happened. The performance where I read the list under the fake corner was projected on the wall of the gallery space with the sound.

2.

“To bring to this place a video performance which happened first in another place and was the original performance of the performance that took place in this room two days ago.”

The first performance performed in Part I was based on a video performance I made some months before this event. In Part I I made the same actions, wearing the same clothes as I had done before. In Part II, this original video performance, made in this Kiasma space, was installed on two monitors, one on top of the other.

3.

“To bring a documentation and the props of the performance to the same room where the filming of the performance took place.”

I placed the fake corner, which now had the drooping rose, and the marks of the colours and the tubes dried and glued onto the corner's surface, to the gallery space. The place was not exactly the same place as where the corner was on Part I (this was due to Part II installation technical needs). On the background of the fake corner was projected the video documentation of the Part I performance with the rose and the colour.

4.

“According to Gwen John's biographer Sue Roe, Paris smelled in John's time of iodoform, pommes frites – and fear, if we believe Rilke's notes. (Roe, Sue (2002). Gwen John. A Life. Vintage, London. p.47) This installation is an attempt to bring those smells to the here and now. For the smell of fear, please have a smell of the armpits of the dress I was wearing two days ago when performing in this same space.”

I put the unwashed dress to hang on to the wall with drawing pins. The brown paper bag full of French fries was placed on to the floor below the dress. I had a white plastic bottle with disinfectant liquid and during the installation I squirted this liquid onto the floor near the chips. The disinfectant had quite distinctive smell but it evaporated quickly.

Making of the Portrait (2012)

Video documentation of live performance at Skånes Konstförening Malmö, Sweden

Duration 38 min 52 sec

This media is on disc 2

Making of the Portrait was performed in Malmö, Sweden, at Skånes Konstförening on September 29th 2012. The performance was part of the event “Miraculous (Organic)” curated by Essi Kausalainen and Mikko Kuorinki. The event took place in an art gallery space.

Length of the performance: 40 minutes.

The set-up for the piece (in a white wall gallery space) required a fake corner (approximately 150cm wide by 200cm high), a white chair, and three transparent buckets. The bucket on the left contained red soft clown noses, the bucket in the middle uncooked white eggs, and the bucket on the right contained red tomatoes. One tomato was sitting on the white chair.

On the right side was a table with an egg timer, envelopes, a pen, a pile of blank paper and numerous copies of (originally) a handwritten letter. The content of the letter was as follows:

29th September

2012 Malmö

Dear Stranger,

For the next 40 minutes I will work as your model for you to create a performance using the props provided (eggs, clown noses, tomatoes, fake corner) and choose from the advice(s) in the list below.

Making of the portrait:

- 1. strange form*
- 2. the pose and proportions*
- 3. the atmosphere and notes*
- 4. the finding of the forms (the sphere – the hair – the forehead, the cheek, the eye, the nose, the mouth, the neck, the chin, the torso)*
- 5. blobbing*
- 6. the sculpting with hands*

(the list was written in 1932 by Welsh painter Gwen John. (Gwen John: A Life; Sue Roe, pp. 92, Chatto & Windus 2001)

If you prefer you can write me a letter in which you say what kind of performance you would create using the advice and props mentioned above. Also describe in what kind of space this performance would happen. Please indicate if you are happy, if I create this performance one day and please leave your contact details.

At the beginning of the performance I put the timer on for 40 minutes and said to the audience: “I have something for you to read here on the table, so please.” Afterwards, I walked to the chair where the tomato was already set and sat down taking the tomato in my lap, holding it in my hand. I sat still while the audience was reading the letter left for them on the table.

The ‘portraits’ (actions) made by the audience using the props, my body and the advices of the letter were:

1. A woman placed one egg under my bend of the arm, one on my palm, one under my armpit, one between my ankles. She tested if the corner would look nice behind my body but after asking opinions from other audience members she decided to move it back to where it was.
2. Another woman took two tomatoes from the bucket and placed them under my toes.
3. A young boy tried to put a soft nose on top of my head, but it didn’t stay there and rolled to the floor. The boy put three eggs and two tomatoes on my palm, which was still resting on my lap.
4. A man took a tomato from the bucket and put it in my mouth.

5. A woman took the corner and placed it so that part of the audience (those sitting in the middle) was unable to see me. She took the tomato away from my mouth and threw it away over the corner.
6. A man took the fake corner away on front of me and placed it behind me so that the corner was next to the wall corner with the edges facing out. He took four tomatoes from the bucket. One was placed in front of my toes, one behind on the left side of the chair I was sitting on, the other on the right side. The man put all the other tomatoes from the floor as well as the nose the boy had tried to place on the top of my head, back to the buckets.
7. A young boy took two eggs and broke them on the walls of the fake corner, one on both sides. After this he took two tomatoes and placed them on the top of the corner so that they were cut-in-half by the edge of the corner.
8. A woman went behind me next to the corner and built a line from the place where the eggs were broken to the place where the man before had placed the tomatoes using the eggshells, yolk and egg white. She placed the rest of the eggshells behind my heels.
9. Another woman took the egg bucket and placed it next to my chair on the left-hand side. To the right-hand side she moved the tomato bucket. The bucket full of noses was moved a little bit more front as it was before. The woman parted my hair. She took four eggs from the bucket and let them roll freely on the floor.

10. A woman explained what she wanted me to do by giving me instructions. She wanted me to stand up on the chair (before standing up I dropped all the eggs and tomatoes I was still holding). The woman asked me to place the fake corner so that I would be able to roll tomatoes alongside the corner. The woman said I should resolve how that would be possible. I placed the corner to rest towards my upper stomach and leant down to be able to give the corner a slight angle for rolling. I needed to hold the edges by hand to keep the corner open at a right angle for the rolling. After I was ready, the woman gave me tomatoes, which I rolled down as she had wished.
11. A young boy threw four eggs to the fake corner I was still holding while standing on the chair.
12. A man took two clown noses and placed those on the tip of the corner edges.
13. A man lifted the corner away from me and placed it to the side of the chair. He asked me to step down and gave me the bucket full of clown noses and asked me to throw the whole content of the bucket to the wall on the left-hand side of the space. After doing this I went back to sit down on the chair.
14. A young boy put the empty bucket on my head and broke several eggs on my feet, some with his hand, some thrown on my feet. He placed the fake corner behind me and threw one egg in the corner.

15. A man moved my feet and arms – feet to rest on the floor, hands to rest on my thighs. He took the bucket away from my head.

16. A man put two noses in the bucket and put the bucket back on my head. He also turned my right hand palm back up again and placed an egg on my palm.

17. A woman came and pressed my palm closed until the egg broke.

The alarm went off and I walked away, the performance was over. No one had written any letters during the 40 minutes.

Study for Colours (2011/2015)

Video

Duration 3 min 39 sec

This media is on disc 2

Picture (p. 51) and discussion in written part of the thesis: Chapter 3 (p. 50)

This small video, like a still life, and a series of photographic sketches, formed part of the research for Gwen John project. To remember colours Gwen John utilised a memory technique wherein she attached a certain colour to a certain object; in this way, something observed and sketched in a notebook would stay with her until the moment of painting it occurred in the studio environment. In her final years the written material in her notebooks and letters suggest that she was moving towards theorising and making sketches rather than to focus on finishing a painting. (Lloyd-Morgan, 2004: 15.) This fact – treating the process of making as equally as valuable as the final work – alongside the lists Gwen John wrote (such as those I used in the performance *Making of the Portrait* and *An Attempt for Making of*), inspired me to do some tests with painting materials and objects. I'd also had some thoughts about the painterly in still life pictures in my mind – i.e. that in the end the still life is not the objects it represents but the painting material. I chose lemons, as they were already in one of my still lives – composition *Vie Coye (Citron and Fin)* – and also because the different tones of yellow are mentioned in John's notebooks. The natural lemon colour is here juxtaposed with the shades of Naples Yellow and Lemon Yellow.

Collaboration with Favela Vera Ortiz (2012)

5 video performances

Duration 11 min 01 sec

This media is on disc 2

Picture (p. 64) and discussed in written part of the thesis: Chapter 3 (p. 50)

An Attempt to Fool the Fake Ear

An Attempt to Slither

An Attempt to Squeeze the Ball

An Attempt to Loose a Nose

An Attempt to Focus

I invited the choreographer Favela Vera Ortiz to collaborate with me and our work together took place across two brief periods in 2011 and 2012. The result of the project was five lens-based performances. She guided me in my early steps towards intentionally developing my performances for movement-based practice. Another reason to work with somebody else (during this study project I have also worked with the choreographers/dancers Siriol Joyner and Hamish MacPherson) was to explore the question of being a model and to allow someone else to ‘mould’ my body. The background for this was the project of Gwen John and her modelling work for Auguste Rodin in his *Muse*-sculpture.

While the works and collaborations progressed, the ideas developed further from the original thoughts. With Favela the work shaped around my attempts, which I have

worked with quite a while, to do something that is not possible, i.e. attempting to move in a manner that is not possible for the human body, and to create something absurd.

The role of the choreographer was to be a movement adviser for the five attempts in which the keywords for the pieces were: portraiture, eggs, noses, lens-based performance.

Collaboration with Siriol Joyner (2013)

Photographic documentation of rehearsals

This media is on disc 3

Another choreographer/performer I worked with was Siriol Joyner. The pictures are research in progress (incomplete artworks) where I was studying how to take my performances more towards movement, and questioning how being a model can be embodied when working with and under some one else's instructions. With Siriol we worked on contact improvisation exercises, with Auguste Rodin's sculptures and Gwen John's work both as a model, and working with a model, as the background to these rehearsals. This period of research was essential for the collaboration with Hamish MacPherson on March 2015, which was the final practice part of this study.

54 Attempts for Sulky Face (2011)

Series of 45 photographs

This media is on disc 3

Picture (p. 103) and discussion in written part of the thesis: Chapter 4 (p. 76)

The source of inspiration for this piece is Gwen John's painting *Study of a Girl Holding a Doll* (circa 1914) which has also been called *A Girl With a Sulky Expression* (Chamot, Farr & Butlin, 1964: I). In the photographs, I am attempting to perform a face with a sulky expression. The repetition of the subject refers to the series of sets John painted of the same subject. There are, for example, drawings of Dorelia (partner of her brother Augustus), which are repeated almost identically in order to be able to study the same image over and over again (Tauban, 1985: 27). Some of John's series of the same subject have only slight changes between one another (Tauban, 1985: 21).

Performance One-to-One (2010)

Documentation of performance

Duration 7 min 29 sec

This media is on disc 3

Pictures (p. 91) and discussed in written part of the thesis: Chapter 4 (p. 76)

Photographs are from *Kiasma /Theatre.now festival* 12th October 2010.

The performance is based on the *tableaux vivants* – living pictures – tradition.

The artist invites one person from the audience to join the performance where the scripted performance is augmented with a reference to an existing piece of art and associated written material. Interpretations, reception, and look become the focal points of the performance where art and viewers meet.

The piece is based on educational text that was on display next to Gwen John's painting *Nude Girl* in Tate Britain Gallery in January 2010. The text was the following: "The human body, a traditional theme in western art, was a tricky subject for women artists at the turn of the century because of questions of morality and decorum. By using a narrow colour range and minimal setting, and suppressing biographical details, John draws attention to the naked body. At the same time, the character of the model, Fenella Lovell, comes across powerfully. So the viewer experiences this painting, disconcertingly, as a portrait of a contemporary woman with no clothes on, who seems to be uncomfortable that we are looking at her." (Tate Britain, 2010.)

The performance was designed to be seen by one audience member at a time. I was performing to the camera in one room and one audience member was watching this

performance in another room via TV monitor and headphones. In the beginning of the performance I introduced myself, explained where the text I was about to read was from, and then read the text (the quote above). After I had finished reading the text, I took off the dress I was wearing and posed in a similar fashion, covering my lower body, to the model in Gwen John's painting *Nude Girl*. I was holding the same still position for three minutes. When the time was over I walked off the picture and closed the camera. I had an assistant giving me sound cues when the audience member was ready to watch the TV monitor, and when the agreed interval had passed. I didn't know if the audience member was watching the whole performance or not.

KISS ME / ST IVES PROJECT

Contents

Kiss Me

Excerpt from live performance and the videos that were screened

as a part of the installation, including Train (slow) page 135

St Ives

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Kiss Me – the performance installation (2010)

(An attempt for Performance, Lecture & Installation)

Documentation of performance Kiasma/theatre.now Festival 17.10.2010

This media is on disc 4

Pictures (p. 87) and discussion in written part of the thesis: Chapter 4 (p. 76)

Kiss Me is a performance installation that takes place on a theatre stage. The installation part – which also works as a ‘scene’ for a live performance – consists of three video screenings and sound. On one side of the stage there are props: ballet shoes, a needle and thread, and on the other side of the stage a stand with a copy of Virginia Woolf’s book. Next to the stand two landscape photographs are hanging.

The video screening is a triptych: in the middle is a picture of a woman sitting on a boat at sea in front of a lighthouse. On either side is shown a slow-motion video that was filmed through a train window. The installation’s soundscape is sea ambiance.

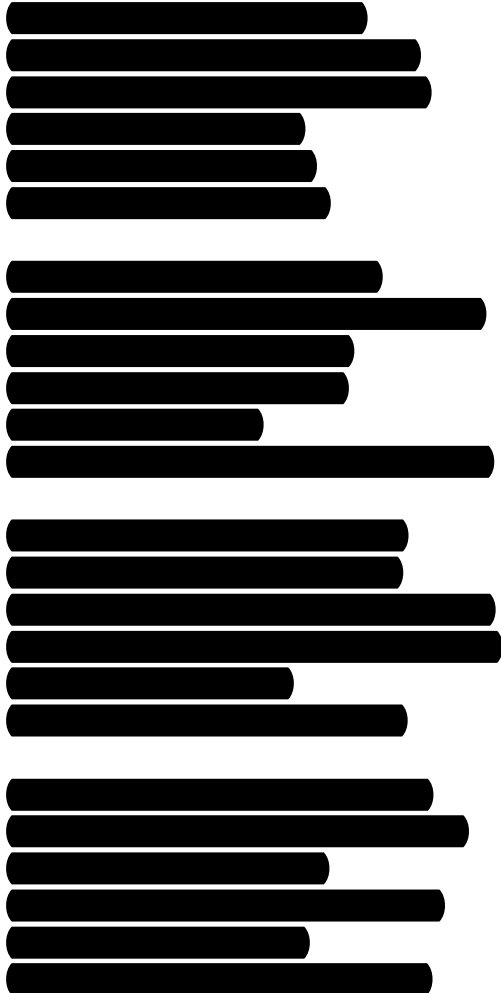
**

The first act of the performance starts when the sea sound fades away, and the middle screen from the video triptych crossfades to show the picture from a live video camera. The camera and I (as a performer) are behind the stage, only shown to the audience via this live stream picture. The camera lens is aiming towards a mirror that is lying on the floor. I step on to the mirror (audience will then see the camera shooting under my dress) and say, “Virginia Woolf didn’t often look straight to the camera lens.”

Next I go and lie down on the floor so that the camera will show a profile of my face.

Lisa Hannigan's song *Lille* starts to play. I am singing along with the song that is played on a CD.

Lisa Hannigan: Lille



(Hannigan, 2008. Sea Sew. ATO Records, LLC.)

When the last verse starts I stand up and walk on the stage and stand still until the song is over. After the *Lille* song the video triptych returns back to the installation version, except that the only sound is now coming from a radio microphone attached to my body.

**

I next walk over to the ballet shoes and needle & thread. I pick up one of the ballet shoes and start to sew an elastic ribbon to it. My sewing is clumsy and sewing goes on for a while in silence. I finish the first ribbon then I move onto the other one.

I start to speak in a free way that doesn't sound like rehearsed speech while still sewing. The story goes in an order described above, although it is partly improvised. I am here only trying to say relevant facts:

Firstly I relate details from Helene Schjerfbeck's (1862-1946) life, how she was shortly engaged to an Englishman. The engagement happened in Pont Aven, France, before Schjerfbeck spent time in St Ives. St Ives is also the same town where Virginia Woolf spent her childhood summers. Schjerfbeck knew French language well and it is likely that she and her fiancé communicated in French, as we do not know that she would have known the English language before she went to St Ives. There she took English lessons and probably learnt the language quite well. There is one thing that Schjerfbeck was able to say for sure in English before her times in St Ives. This sentence is "Kiss me dear girl". These facts are told in her letter to Maria Wiik while Schjerfbeck was in Paris. The letter is written after the engagement was already over. Schjerfbeck went to Paris to recover from her loss and to paint. In her letter Helen describes her journey to the Opera with two Swedish female artists. After the show they were walking on the street when a horse wagon with two French men inside stopped next to them. The men were fascinated by one of the Swedish girl's red hair and they asked Scandinavian girls to get into their wagon. Helen tells also in her letter, how the men said to them: "Kiss

me dear girl”. The ‘girls’ didn’t get into the wagon.

There are not many known facts about the Schjerfbeck’s fiancé, not even his name. Schjerfbeck destroyed, and asked all her friends and relatives to destroy too, all the correspondence they shared with her. A couple of facts that we do know about her fiancé are surely not flattering for him. First of all he was the one to end the engagement with Helen. This happened via letter when Schjerfbeck was in Finland. The man wrote that the reason for him to end the engagement was due to Helene’s invalid leg, as he thought invalidity was caused by tuberculosis (this wasn’t the truth of her invalidity, she was in an accident as a child). Another fact about Helen’s fiancé is that he later married an Englishwoman. After couple of years of marriage she died and “a nasty disease” she got from her husband caused her death.

Around this time I finish sewing and my speech changes to tell a story from my own adulthood. I am remembering when I was an *Au Pair* in Paris, and how one evening I met two boys. One was called Mirko the other Marko. My memories of their appearances are quite faint. I do remember one was attractive and I fancied him, and that I didn’t like the other whose jumper smelled of sweaty armpits. Still, we exchanged our phone numbers. I so wished the one I fancied – let’s say he was Marko – would call me. A couple of days later my phone rang and it was Mirko but I just didn’t remember anymore which one was Mirko and which Marko. Of course I wanted to think the caller was Marko and I had butterflies in my stomach. We were already talking about setting up a date, when something in what he said made me realise it was Mirko, not Marko, that I was speaking to. I quickly rang off the phone and I never heard from either him or Marko again.

After this story I start to take my shoes off and to change to wear the ballet shoes that I have just sewn new ribbons onto.

I look straight to the audience and tell them I can't really tell their age as the lights on the stage are too bright. However, if someone is about my age and was a teen in late 1980s they should remember a medical check-up everyone went through in their puberty. It was something you knew about and were afraid of, as older schoolmates would have been talking about it. The scariest thing was to know that the doctor would also look into your pants. I remember how painful it was to wait in a classroom to be called. A class was going on as normal and everyone was called in alphabetical order to go to the nurse's room. Afterwards it was difficult to get back into class, as everyone was looking at you with their smirking faces and boys were commenting "Haikala, why are your cheeks are so red, why are you blushing?"

Actually it was something else that I was more ashamed of than the fact the doctor had checked my pubic hairs. He looked at my naked body, especially my legs, and said, "I think you are able to walk through one life with those legs."

While I am saying this I undress and change my shoes for ballet shoes. Under my dress I am wearing a beige dance tricot.

**

I walk to other side of the stage to where the stand with the open book is. The book is

Virginia Woolf's autobiographical essay *A Sketch of the Past*. I stand behind the two hanging photographs on tiptoe, trying to cover my breast and crotch areas (actually in the premiere the lower photo was too high!). At the same time I am reading an excerpt from the book, which is about Woolf remembering a shameful memory from her childhood that took place in St Ives - her stepbrother touched her intimate body parts improperly. Woolf is also talking about how she felt about her body, mirrors and clothes.

While I am reading my head is in profile. When my legs get tired of tiptoeing or I start to lose body balance, I stop reading, stand normally and look straight to the audience. Towards the end of the reading my legs get more tired and I have more breaks. At the end of this scene I walk back to where my clothes are and get dressed.

**

I walk to the very front of the stage and get a microphone from the technical assistant. The lightning is very strong and aimed towards my eyes, and as a result I have difficulty keeping my eyes open (the same effect as in bright sunlight). I am asking the audience to participate and pass the microphone around the audience. Everyone (or at least that is my wish) says one sentence to the microphone and the sentence is "Kiss me". Each time somebody in the audience said, "Kiss me", I took a pose. After passing through the audience, microphone returns to me and I stand still and say "Artistically it is better to think we were on our way to St Ives." (Woolf, 1985: 81-215.)

I walk away and the sound of the waves returns and the performance is over.

**

One 'prop' of the performance is a programme given to all audience members when they enter the theatre. In the programme are all the quotes and facts mentioned during the performance.

Duration of the performance is about 30 minutes.

**

The video and sound works also as an independent installation that can be shown separately. The video was shot in St Ives. The middle part of the video installation is filmed in St Ives Bay in front of the Godrevy Lighthouse. I am sitting still in a boat that is not moving towards the island, it is just floating. My face is in profile looking down. This composition was inspired by three facts. One is connected to portrait pictures of Virginia Woolf – she hardly ever looks straight to the camera. Secondly Godrevy Lighthouse is said to be the inspiration for Woolf's novel *To The Lighthouse*. The third inspiration for this video piece comes from painting – the Finnish artist Maria Wiik, who also spent time in St Ives, has a painting called "*Woman in boat*". This painting was in my mind when planning the composition and deciding how the filming should happen on the sea.

The side videos of the triptych are filmed on the train journey from St Erth station to St Ives. I am holding the camera still so that in some parts of the work the reflection of my body in the train window comes visible. This original 10 minute take is edited to be

almost 1.5 hours long. Movement happens very slowly so that the result of this video could be said to be *painterly*. On the right of the triptych the train is leaving St Ives, on the left journey this is reversed. The video of the woman in the boat is about 1 min 3 sec in duration but is a looped playback.

This information leaflet (as indicated between the asterisks below) was given to all audience members of the performance. The pile of leaflets was next to the monitor where the video *Train (slow)* was on display. This video was filmed on the train journey from St Ives to St Erth, Cornwall. The footage is slowed down in an attempt to create an impression of the painterly in the video work.

The media for Train (slow) is on disc 13. (Duration 1 hour 24 min)

**

Kiss Me – Performance Installation

(An Attempt for Performance, Lecture & Installation)

Concept and performance: Eeva-Mari Haikala

Kiasma-theatre 17.10.2010

Performance 3pm, installation open 3.30-6pm.

Videos:

Lobby of the Museum

(intro)

HD-video, mono, duration 1 h 24 min

2010

Sound editing: Ian Stonehouse

On the Stage:

3 video projection video and sound installation

HD-video, stereo, loop

2010

Camera and Sound: Ian Stonehouse

Picture 1.

(Bell & Whybrow 2004, 95)

Picture 2.

Lille, text & music Lisa Hannigan / Sea Sew / 2008 ATO Records, LLC.

Picture 3.

(Konttinen 2004, 106),

(ibid., 136),

(ibid., 107),

(ibid., 136),

(ibid., 131),

(ibid., 107)

Picture 4.

(Woolf 1986 (1939), 89-91)

Picture 5.

also called Kiss me - repeat

Picture 6.

(ibid., 85)

Bibliography:

Dell, Marion & Whybrow, Marion (ed.) 2004. *Virginia Woolf & Vanessa Bell: Remembering St Ives*. Tabb House Original.

Konttinen Riitta 2004. *Oma tie. Helene Schjerfbeckin elämä*. Otava, Helsinki.

Woolf, Virginia 1985 (1939). *Luonnos menneestä*. Teoksessa *Elettyjä hetkiä* (ed. Jeanne Schulkind, Finnish Translation. Kaarina Ripatti), 81-215. Karisto, Hämeenlinna.

Thank you:

AVEK / Heidi Tikka; Finnish Cultural Foundation; Alistair Kerr / First Light Video;

Derek Emery & Crew / St Ives Boats; Kiasma-theatre; and all the others helping during the journey.

**

Untitled series (St Ives) (2010)

This media is on disc 5

Pictures (pp. 78, 86) and discussion in written part of the thesis: Chapter 4 (p. 76)

This photoseries, and one video piece is a result of research and filming journeys to the St Ives and Virginia Woolf's writings.

Photo 1

"With her little Chinese eyes and her puckered-up face, she would never marry; one could not take her painting very seriously..." Virginia Woolf, *To The Lighthouse*.

Photos 2 and 3

() Reading the brackets from *To The Lighthouse's* part 'Time Passes'
I-II

Photos 6 and 7

"Do you think we have the same pair of eyes only different spectacles?", Virginia Woolf wrote to her sister on 17th August 1937.

The Lighthouse (2010/2015)

Video

Duration 2 min 08 sec

This media is on disc 4

A study of perception.

Untitled (Schjerfbeck performance) (2010)

Video documentation of the performance at Club Row London Gallery, part of the Performance Matters/Performing Idea Laboratory event 26.5.2010

Duration 8 min 28 sec

This media is on disc 4

When the performance starts, on the wall of the gallery space where the audience is located is a projected picture of a kitchen clock-shaped cup cake. The fake tart, the other props and myself are in a storage room behind the audience. The performance is done to a video camera that is broadcasting live via a projector into the gallery space. The camera is shooting a mirror that is lying on the floor.

I step on the mirror and start to read:

“Hi, my name is Eeva-Mari and I would like to start by reading an excerpt from a text written by Julia Donner to you. The whole text is about a Finnish (female) painter Helene Schjerfbeck (1862-1946) and can be found on the YLE (Finnish broadcasting company) webpage. The translation is by me.

“Narrow circle of life and sparse subjects – mainly portraits and still lifes – doesn’t mean Helene Schjerfbeck’s art is plain. On the contrary, restrictions meant freedom of creation and surprising limitlessness. At the end of the 19th century artists were seen as servants of their own country, Finland. Painters such as Albert Edelfelt and Eero Järnefelt (who are men, my own comment) felt their mission was to paint national

subjects in a way that would promote the Finnish nation amongst other nations. In Helen Schjerfbeck's art it is impossible to find these kinds of intentions. She is foremost a painter.” (Donner, Julia. *Schjerfbeck Helene*. Sininen laulu. Suomen taiteiden tarina.)

Albert Edelfelt who was mentioned above has been and still is the hero of Finnish Art History. One of his most notorious paintings is a portrait of the French chemist Louis Pasteur. Edelfelt, like many artists on that time, lived and worked in Paris too, where he painted Pasteur's portrait. Helene Schjerfbeck was younger than Edelfelt and she painted in Paris too. It is an historical fact that Schjerfbeck worked as an assistant for Edelfelt when he was working on the portrait of Louis Pasteur. No one actually knows how much Schjerfbeck contributed to this painting. We do know that in one of Edelfelt's letter he describes the painting process thus: “Miss Schjerfbeck is standing here to paint. This is a real collaboration, because I have both drawn and painted the most difficult parts like head and hands.” – and art historians nowadays say that Schjerfbeck's contribution to the portrait was significant. It is easy to agree with that. There is much more to a full figure portrait than just the head and hands. No one knows what the already-established and older painter Edelfelt paid the young Helene for her work. Some of Schjerfbeck's own letters tell us that she was well paid but in one of her letters to her friend, also a female painter, she says that all she got from Edelfelt was a box of chocolates.

This performance is an homage to young Helene Schjerfbeck and to her painting ‘Two Female Profiles’, painted in 1881. To get started I just need to switch on my tart.”

I switch on the fake cake/kitchen clock. Whilst it is clicking I go and lie on the mirror so

that my face creates a double silhouette portrait. I lie there until the alarm goes off. I write on the mirror with lipstick “e-m 10”. The performance is over.

VIDEOWORKS

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Attempt to Retrieve the Past (2009)

Video installation with two videos

Duration 30 min 25 sec / loop

This media is on disc 6

Pictures (p. 95) and discussion in written part of the thesis: Chapter 4 (p. 76)

This work juxtaposes video performance and the still image and is an attempt to retrieve one memory from my past and bring that memory to the space that was a current space in my life in that moment when the work was filmed. The memory is built around the instructions of a dance teacher a long time ago: “Space is yours, do what you want”. The video starts with a quote from Georges Perec’s text *Species of Spaces/Espèces d’espaces*. The quote is a list/word game of different spaces. Perec placed the list in the beginning of his text next to the picture of “Map of the Ocean”, which is a visual quote from Lewis Carroll’s *The Hunting of the Snark*. This picture is an empty square. With the snark, the name game, and the listing of adjacent words, Perec refers to something that is difficult, even impossible, to track down, and so does the idea at the centre of my piece: it is impossible to go back in time and retrieve that moment which created the memory.

Mist (2009)

Video performance

Duration 6 min 14 sec

This media is on disc 7

Picture (p. 62) and discussion in written part of the thesis: Chapter 3 (p. 50)

A woman is standing in a theatre space. She is squirted with water from spray bottles. This work is an homage to the numerous mist landscape paintings. The length of the piece is defined by how long the two men who were squirting the water were able to hold full bottles of water with their arms straight out horizontally.

Candy Floss (2009)

Video performance

Duration 16 min 01 sec

This media is on disc 7

Picture (p. 55) and discussion in written part of the thesis: Chapter 3 (p. 50)

A woman is building a wig for herself with candyfloss.

A Banana Starts with a B (2014)

Video performance

Duration 1 min 13 sec

Sound: an excerpt from *Things Beginning with A* by Ian Stonehouse

This media is on disc 7

Egg (2012/2015)

Video performance

Duration 1 min 46 sec

This media is on disc 7

This lens-based performance continues the line of the attempts that I have been working with throughout all of my career. In this performance I am attempting to crush two raw eggs with the strength of my arm muscles.

A Cooking Pot (2015)

Video performance

Duration 2 min 54 sec

This media is on disc 7

Picture (p. 64) and discussion in written part of the thesis: Chapter 3 (p. 50)

Before standing in front of the camera and placing the cooking pot on her head, a woman listens to a song, the rhythm of which she tries to remember in front of the camera by drumming on the pot.

I Was Waiting For You (My Heart Will Go On) (2014)

Video performance

Duration 7 min 04 sec

This media is on disc 7

Picture (p. 81) and discussion in written part of the thesis: Chapter 4 (p. 76)

In this video performance a woman stands with her back to us on a jetty and raises her outstretched arms to align them with the horizon. As the performance continues, the tiring of her arms becomes gradually visible. The duration of the piece is precisely the length of time I was able to keep my arms horizontal. The work references the famous romantic scene in the movie *Titanic* and the music video *My Heart Will Go On* in which the lovers stand at the bow of the ship.

There are many elements in this piece that occur frequently in my work: the passage of time, waiting, and an apparent absence of events. These aspects are particularly prominent in this video. The woman expects something to happen. The situation itself is absurd, perhaps even sad: something or someone must be missing because she is alone.

At the moment of shooting I created a performative situation and a gesture: theoretically, something could have happened – someone could have come up from behind me to support me. For a long time I had an alternative title to the work: I waited here for you for seven minutes but you never arrived.

Thank you: *Aberystwyth Arts Centre, The Finnish Artists' Studio Foundation, Art Promotion Centre of Finland and Ian Stonehouse (sound editing).*

Vie Coye (Citron) (2010)

Video performance

Duration 30 sec

This media is on disc 7

Picture (p.72) and discussion in written part of the thesis: Chapter 3 (p. 50)

Vie Coye (Citron) takes place in the space between still life and performance. The performance component of the work was shot over thirty days. Each day, I placed myself behind a lemon still life on a table and made a small gesture, which the camera recorded. The performer's voice and appearance change over time, but the lifeless objects stay the same throughout the month. Nevertheless, *Vie Coye (Citron)* blurs the boundary between the lifeless and the living, since, unlike traditional still life painting, in *Vie Coye (Citron)* the artist's body forms part of the composition. Here I use the language of video and performance to ask questions about the passage of time and transience, while, at the same time, exploring the still life genre in painting.

Vie Coye (Fin) (2010)

Video performance

Duration 1 min

This media is on disc 7

Picture (p.72) and discussion in written part of the thesis: Chapter 3 (p. 50)

Vie Coye (Fin) is filmed on the last day of the 30 days daily performance *Vie Coye (Fin)*.

Naming the piece with the name *Fin* refers to the narrative ending often taking place in cinema. 'The End' in many cases in the film industry is combined with a picture of the people kissing, which hints that the story will continue after the film is over. This is called narrative ending. On the other hand the text "The End" duplicates the total silence of death, and means that nothing lies beyond it. (Mulvey, 2006: 71-79.)

Still Life with Flies (2010/2015)

Video

Duration 1 min 23 sec

This media is on disc 7

A study for a still life.

Elle se sentait profondément honteuse (2013) (“She felt a deep sense of shame”)

A Series of photos, super 8 films (transferred to DVD) and an HD-video

The art pieces in the series:

Videos

This media is on disc 8

Elle se sentait profondément honteuse (Dunce’s Hat) (Duration 2 min 18 sec)

Elle se sentait profondément honteuse (Ash) (Duration 2 min 17 sec)

Elle se sentait profondément honteuse (Tomato) (Duration 2 min 18 sec) *Picture (p.72)*
and discussion in written part of the thesis: Chapter 3 (p. 50)

Elle se sentait profondément honteuse (Feather) (Duration 2 min 17 sec)

Photographs

This media is on disc 9

Elle se sentait profondément honteuse (Dunce’s Hat I)

Elle se sentait profondément honteuse (Reveal I)

Elle se sentait profondément honteuse (Reveal II)

Elle se sentait profondément honteuse (Bench I)

Elle se sentait profondément honteuse (Bench II)

This series began when I was invited to take part in an exhibition displaying lens-based performances from Nordic countries. The exhibition was never realised due to finance problems but the name for the concept, ‘Nordic Ego’, had already started to intrigue my

mind, so I decided to finalise those ideas and to add to them the questions and issues that had arisen from my research. In the end the series became my solo exhibition in the Finnish Museum of Photography's Project-gallery.

The basic theme for the project was to explore when a work can be seen as performance art and when it is a work of photography or video art. With this series I suggest that we can refer to a work of art as performance, for example, when the presence of the artist, their body or their experience, is an essential part of the photographic or video piece.

All this has been present a long time in my practice, as well as research, in the form of still lifes and stillness. This time I added other values to it. Whilst working on the piece *Kiss Me*, and going through the writings of Virginia Woolf, I had encountered the issues of shame and guilt she wrote feeling about her body as a child. Woolf even suggests being afraid of her own body. She also writes how some body-related feelings must be instincts and thus are common for all of us. This is something that has justified the use of my own life experiences and my own body in artworks, as I believe the personal becomes common when it is put on display or said out loud. As Bobby Baker as an artist also using her own life experiences, puts it, the piece is not about her, it is about motherhood – an issue that touches everybody.

When using my own body, or making the personal public, the shame always lurks in the background and there is vulnerability between the audience and the performer. There are some similar features between public shaming and performance art, and this connection is where the idea for this piece came from.

The Only Happiness I Know Is Sad Happy (2013 - ongoing)

Photos

This media is on disc 10

The Only Happiness I Know Is Sad Happy (Balcony)

The Only Happiness I Know Is Sad Happy (Nude)

The Only Happiness I Know Is Sad Happy (Stage)

The Only Happiness I Know Is Sad Happy (Wall)

The Only Happiness I Know Is Sad Happy (Curtain)

The Only Happiness I Know Is Sad Happy (Shadow)

The Only Happiness I Know Is Sad Happy (Mistake)

The Only Happiness I Know Is Sad Happy (Stairs)

The Only Happiness I Know Is Sad Happy (View)

The Only Happiness I Know Is Sad Happy (Corner I)

The Only Happiness I Know Is Sad Happy (Corner II)

Video

This media is on disc 11

The Only Happiness I Know Is Sad Happy (Mirror)

Duration 3 min 19 sec

This series of photos and videos (lens-based performances) combines many themes I have been working with during this practice-as-research process. The name comes from

the atmosphere I have been looking for in these pictures. That 'sad happy' atmosphere is the common feature in all of these pictures, even though the content varies from picture to picture. Within this series I am exploring the relation of the human body and space. Spatially I am mostly interested in the spaces that Perec describes to be spaces without function, space that have no purpose whatsoever (Perec, 1977: 33). In reality this kind of space is impossible to exist, but I see that impossibility holds in it a performative possibility that allows one to play with the concept and with the actual space the pictures have been taken in. So even when the space in my pictures is empty, there is a possibility for some kind of presence of the human body, which is similar to how the human body is present/absent in still life paintings.

Performance ‘Pizza’ (2010)

Documentation of performance

Roehampton Labnight and Mänttä Art Festival

This media is on disc 12

Picture (p. 54) and discussion in written part of the thesis: Chapter 3 (p. 50)

In the beginning of the performance, there is a projector, a pile of pizza boxes and water mugs on the floor of the performance space. I walk on to the space holding a white bowl under my arm. I turn on the projector and the text below becomes visible for the audience to read. I open the first pizza box in the pile and start to chew it. Instead of swallowing, I spit the mushed pizza from my mouth into the bowl. Once in a while I take a theatrical tear-stick from my pocket and spread it under my eyes to create tears running down my cheeks and snot running from the nose.

The performance ends when somebody from the audience claps his/her hands.

“It took the best part of a morning for twenty students to re-enact the most intimate scene of their lives. Most of them chose a key moment from their parents’ divorce. Some attempted a sexual encounter or a scene of public shame. One of the girls brought a pile of pizza boxes on to the stage. She chewed through each slice until it was mush and then spat it out into a white bowl she held under her arm. She wept and wept, and had chewed her way through three cold pizzas before the Head of Acting finally clapped his hands and said, ‘Good. Thank you. We can work with that.’”

Eleanor Catton 2008. The Rehearsal. Granta Publications, London. p.182.

**

You are welcome to take the role of the *Head of Acting* during the performance.

**

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